SYBILLA

*

MRS G. LINNÆUS BANKS

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SYBILLA,

AND OTHER STORIES.

BY

MRS G. LINNÆUS BANKS,

AUTHOR OF "GOD'S PROVIDENCE HOUSE," "THE MANCHESTER MAN," "GLORY," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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SYBILLA.

CHAPTER I.

THE NEW HOME, AND THE OLD WHEEL.

THE ancient manor of Timperley, on the north-east border of Cheshire, has not been held by a Timperley for more than two centuries, so long is it since it was carried by co-heiresses into other families, only to be finally merged in the estate of Dunham-Massey. And though the old black and white Hall still clings to the soil, and to the name of Timperley, and stands within its own demesne, it has no longer a lordly

tenant, and is but one of the scattered homesteads now inhabited by merchant traders from the great commercial city within a brief railway ride. For here and there, besides the few small farms and cottage homes these old places dot the undulating landscape, almost lost amid their own oaks and sycamores, and hard to find amid the maze of winding lanes and streams, o'er which the willow and the ash wave graceful foliage. Fortunately for pedestrian wayfarers, bridges, mostly of stone, span these flowing waters ; ay, and waters that are not flowing, for over the serpentine lakelet, which separates the picturesque garden ground of the Oaklands from the meadow-land, more than one bridge has been thrown for private convenience.

Neither, though tinted by time, dates back to the far antiquity of the many-gabled homestead, and one may have arisen under the same artistic hand that added to the quaint old place so lovingly in consonance ; but the other, lying back to the

north-east of the dwelling, half hidden among trees, has, like the abode itself, a far-away history for the telling.

The village proper has but one wide street, with a few diverging alleys—one shop for diverse commodities, one school which flourishes under the wing of the church; which church, with its oddly-shaped spire, stands as a landmark within a green churchyard, on the top of a broad knoll in the rear of the Oaklands; the one solitary spot of rising ground in the rich, if somewhat level landscape. The cosy vicarage looks out on its own beds of old-fashioned, sweet-scented flowers, and on wide-spreading market-gardens which flourished all around.

It was otherwise in 1740, when Elizabeth Coppock, the former owner of the Oaklands, having died a spinster, her executors, John Coppock, of Timperley, a tanner, and Esther Leicester, widow, the brother and sister of the deceased, disposed of the house and lands to Thomas Venables, of Prestbury, gentleman, a widower with a long

pedigree and one child, a fair-haired maiden of seventeen, whose name was Sybilla.

At that period the country roads hereabouts were little better than cart tracks, the lanes mere packhorse or bridle-paths; the hall, the farm, the tannery, and a few cottages represented the village; the nearest market was at Altringham,* more than two miles away; the nearest church at Bowdon, a like distance; and the road which came direct through the village from Baguley Moor, was crossed by Fairy Well Brook before it reached the Oaklands or Timperley Hall, and again by Timperley Brook ere it branched off right and left in an acute angle to Altringham and Bowdon. There was no canal then even projected for Altringham, the bridges were unbuilt, and whoso would pass over a stream must ford it as best might be. But use is second nature; the peasantry would go fearlessly through the water barefooted or shod with thick wooden-soled clogs; and even dainty

* Now spelled Altrincham.

misses would tuck up their skirts and trip across the slippery stepping-stones on their way to church or market.

Then, too, the lands and the homesteads thereon were mostly in the hands of gentlemen or of yeomen, who cultivated their own grounds from father to son; and though the tanner, John Coppock, was a man of substance, and his wife disputed precedence with the Widow Leicester in the church porch, they both made way for the wives and daughters of acknowledged gentry with becoming reverence.

With a difference—that is. Mrs Leicester had a snug cottage and an income of her own, had buried the trade which had provided both, along with her dead husband, and having no occupation but the cares of her widowhood, on the strength of his name claimed for her dead husband some sort of affinity with Sir Peter Leycester's family, and held her head somewhat high.

Mr Venables had certainly bought the Oaklands at a very low figure; and it was said that had not Mistress Leicester's voice

outweighed that of her brother in striking the bargain for her dead sister's property, he would not have obtained possession so cheaply. And it was hinted by her sister-in-law, in the privacy of the tannery house-place, that the widow had shown favour to the widower, who was "a personable man and a gentleman," with the ulterior object of quitting her white-washed cottage for the Oaklands, and so taking precedence of her, Joan Coppock, at once and for ever.

But whether Mr Thomas Venables was obtuse, or Mistress Leicester did not take his fancy, or he was content with his state of widowerhood, or she had no such views, the result was the same. He came and went many times before the purchase was fully completed, but he evinced no disposition to give the place any mistress but his daughter Sybilla.

She had lost her mother quite two years, but her father had not cast his mourning suit; indeed, he was quitting Prestbury for Timperley partly to rid himself of old

associations and painful memories. Leaving behind the old church wherein the public benefactions of his immediate ancestors were recorded, and where his own good wife lay buried.

There were censorious persons who said that his wife had been a soft creature, crushed under his arbitrary rule ; and that remorse, not aching affection, had driven him to let his paternal estate to strangers and make a home for himself elsewhere.

However this might be, he set no bounds to his love for her child, the one only blossom of their married life ; and it might be that there was some truth in the rumour that as one covers up a honeypot from the flies, so he had removed his sweet Sybilla from rash admirers in Prestbury, lest he should lose her also.

"Only the one! Only the one!" had been the cry of the married pair whensoever illness dimmed the blue eyes of their darling ; "Only the one!" had been the excuse when sterner fathers or mothers blamed them for overmuch indulgence of

the girl God had given; for family discipline in those days was something rigid and awe-inspiring, and woful things were predicted if the cherished Sybilla was allowed to have so much of her own way. And as she grew up tall and graceful, and beautiful and winning with the growing years, the parents were content, and only loved her the more as they made little concessions to her fancies or her inclinations. Not so much Mrs Venables as her lord, who rejoiced to see in Sybilla a shadowing forth of his own resolute and determined will.

"A true Venables is Sybilla!" he cried, "none of your puny weaklings without a will of their own."

And the mother quietly acquiesced, well-content that it should be so, having a notion that she herself would have fared none the worse had her own self-reliance and determination been a trifle stronger.

But with the true Venables' spirit and strength of will, Sybilla had inherited the clinging, sympathetic, affectionate nature of her mother also, and by this she won

her way into the hearts of others—and others into hers. And when her mother's failing health threw the burden of household cares on younger shoulders, it was the union of these qualities that enabled her to control even those old servants most inclined to resist her delegated authority.

Certainly it was admitted in the servants' quarters, even by bent and wrinkled old Josh, who had been groom and gardener when the master was a boy, and by waddling Ursula, who ruled the roast and kept the maids in order, that young Mistress Sybilla was not ill-qualified to govern. There had been controversy on the point, and some show of rebellion at first, but in assembled conclave so much was deliberately, if reluctantly, conceded.

They were quite right; she was not ill-qualified.

Her mother's indulgence had not comprehended luxurious idleness. The distant boarding-schools of the period had not been thought of for the maiden. Teachers had been found nearer to their own door; and

the gentle mother herself, well skilled in home-accomplishments, had kept her young fingers busy, on the principle that

> "Satan finds some mischief still,
> For idle hands to do."

She could not only use her sewing-needle well, but she could make wines and confections, clearstarch the kerchiefs and ruffles of father and mother, knit mittens and hose, embroider cushions and covers in tent stitch, lull her sire to sleep with the music of her spinet, and, thanks to the instruction of the vicar, she could write a letter in a fair round-hand and tolerable English, and keep the domestic accounts with a clearness and accuracy by no means common in that day and generation, even amongst gentlewomen.

A mere child when her father first set her on horseback, she learned to ride alone (without a pillion and supporter), a fearless horsewoman regardless of rough roads.

But Sybilla's chief accomplishment was spinning. Not that spinning was deemed

a mere accomplishment. From the fireside of the cotter or the farmer, to the halls of the landed gentry, spinning was yet considered part of a woman's daily occupation ; and the country damsel who had not spun the linen for her future use and home, was regarded as an unthrift, and scarcely worthy to marry. But Sybilla's dainty touch had converted the common art into an accomplishment, and the even fineness of her thread was discussed, and commended on many a hearth as an exemplar for other maidens.

It must be remembered that there was no Mudie in those days to send relays of novels in boxes by the carrier, the books on Mr Venables' shelves were not altogether inviting, and winter evenings were illuminated only by candles, so that knitting or spinning, which required little light, and did not interfere with conversation or meditation, was congenial employment for feminine fingers.

Whatever motive urged the widower to quit Prestbury for Timperley, Sybilla's

fame must have preceded her. When she and her father on a chilly morning in spring alighted from their horses at the Oaklands, and found Mrs Leicester waiting in the porch to surrender the keys and show the young lady over the house, which she saw for the first time, and which the widow had effusively volunteered to air for their reception, the obsequious dame's salutations proclaimed it.

"Welcome to the Oaklands, sir! Welcome to *your* new home, Miss Venables! and, meaning no offence, I would say I'm proud my sister Bess is like to have so gradely a successor in the old place."

Sybilla's face was shadowed by her riding-hat, but she raised her head and her eyelids somewhat as she adjusted her disordered skirts, and their questioning was as clear as her father's audible "How so, good dame?"

"Well, sir," and the "good dame" kept a watchful eye on the young face under the black beaver's broad brim as she led the way through a small queerly-shaped en-

trance-hall and other passages to a wider apartment already provided with a table and chairs, and an appetising repast for the travellers by their attentive cicerone,—"Well, sir," she repeated, "my dead and gone sister, Bess Coppock, was counted the finest wool-spinner in these parts; and I've been given to understand the young mistress here is a match for the best spinner in all Cheshire," and the same furtive look went towards the fair face under the beaver's brim.

"Ay, so 'tis said," was the complacent answer of the well-pleased father. "But 'tis overfacing to flatter young maidens so openly. You have brought blushes into her cheeks already."

"Ay! but it is none for the flattery she is blushing, good lack! I warrant miss guesses where I got to hear of her fine spinning," was the sly thought of the knowing widow. Her open reply was,—"Nay, it's more like the keen March wind. I hope it's given Miss Venables an appetite as well as a colour."

"Right, Mrs Leicester, there's nothing like a brisk ride on a cold morning to paint cheeks and sharpen appetites. The refreshments your civility has provided will be welcome, and I thank you for both of us, since Sybilla seems too shy." And, hanging his three-cornered hat on a knob of the chair's high back, he took his seat at the table with the ease of a man in his own house, to whom such attention was due, and made a sign for Sybilla to do the same.

She had removed her travelling cloak or cardinal, but not her hat, and had thanked the widow before she took her seat; but it was with an air of reserve, which protested against a stranger's familiar observations and attention, rather than the gracious acceptance of courtesy.

Meanwhile Mrs Leicester had so much to say for the pastry and the home-brewed, the honey, the cheese, and the wheaten bread, all of which were pressed upon them as due to her own skill, or that of her "dead sister, Bess Coppock," that soon Mr Ven-

ables became as weary of her fussy attendance as his daughter. The hasty luncheon over, Sybilla rose to inspect her new home, the widow volunteering her services as guide, while Mr Venables went out to inspect the stables.

She knew every nook and corner of the old place, she said, though she never thought it would be her duty to hand it over to a stranger, and again she launched out into praise of her dead sister, and encomiums of her living successor as a wool-spinner.

"You are mistaken, Mrs Leicester. I am not much of a wool-spinner. I have principally spun flax," was the somewhat distant acknowledgment of Miss Venables, as she hastened to follow her guide over the curious and intricate abode, before the waggons laden with their goods and chattels should arrive.

"Well now, only to think of that!" exclaimed the other, as they turned midway the sharp angle of the oaken staircase. "And there, I wouldn't let John Coppock or his wife disturb sister's wheel. I said

they might make away with the maid's wheel in the house-place if they liked, but I told them that maybe Mr Venables' daughter might choose Bess's room for her own, seeing that it had two doors, and was handy for keeping the lazy servant lasses in order, being nigh both the front stairs and the back.'

"Oh, is it?" interjected Sybilla, with just a faint show of interest, and scarcely a second glance at the large wheel left as a fixture against the wall.

"Ay, and I said you might be glad to find a good wheel set up ready to your hand, for all the folk about here spin wool, mostly for the Manchester weavers, an' I'll warrant there's no better wheel i' all Timperley. A rare lot of fine yarn did Bess spin with it; and a vast lot of fine hose and kersey did Hugh Furnival get from his aunt, for she was a knitter as well as a spinner, miss; and there's a weaver nigh at hand on the moor, should you happen to want one."

Sybilla had listened idly whilst taking a critical survey of the apartment or apart-

ments, mentally resolving, for various reasons, to take the hint given, and make them her own; but as Hugh Furnival's name fell from the widow's lips there was the slightest possible start, and her colour visibly changed. She turned to a window to hide it, but not before the watchful Mrs Leicester had seen all she wanted, unobservant as she appeared.

The latter went on, without waiting for a response, "Well, to be sure, I thought the wheel would be just the thing for you, and sing as merry a tune to your turning as it did to our Bess. And, after all, I reckon you won't want the wheel?"

This last was half an interrogation, and she looked more than a little disconcerted by Sybilla's lack of appreciation.

So perceptible was this that the young lady, having regained her own composure, came to her relief and said, without turning, "Thank you, Mrs Leicester, for your good intent. The wheel can be left where it is, at least for the present. Perhaps I may try my hand at wool occasionally for a change.

It would be ungrateful to neglect such a thoughtful provision. I will mention it to my father. But here come the wains. We must complete our survey quickly."

And without another word, or a token of interest in Hugh Furnival, Bess Coppock's nephew, or the hose spun and knitted for his use, she passed through the opposite door, and from room to room, looking into cupboards and presses by the way, and went down the retired back staircase to the house-place and kitchen, in advance of the loquacious Mrs Leicester.

The servants had come along with the heavily-loaded waggons; Josh on horseback with a maid on a pillion behind him, whilst fat Mrs Ursula and another woman were softly seated on the feather-beds at the back of the last waggon. Soon all was bustle and excitement; Mrs Leicester, quite unsolicited, hurrying hither and thither, proffering her services as guide to the premises with rather more zeal than discretion.

Ere long the grave gentleman in black

raised his three-cornered hat and said, "Many thanks, Mrs Leicester, but you need not trouble. My daughter can direct the men and maids. I leave all domestic arrangements to her." And Sybilla herself hinted later on that she was not wanted, by saying, "Our old servants are shy of strangers."

She had had enough of Mrs Leicester, and Mrs Leicester saw it.

She trudged home through the green lane, shaking her head as she went, and muttering to herself, "If Hugh Furnival is good enough for the company of miss, surely Hugh's aunt might be; and for all some folk hold their heads so high, pride may have a come-down some day. And what can a chit of a girl know of household management? I should like to know!"

She had frequent opportunities to learn, for on any excuse or no excuse, Mrs Leicester obtruded her society and services at the Oaklands, most anxious lest Mr Venables or his household should lack

anything at the hands of Sybilla, that her more mature experience could supply.

But Sybilla Venables had already proved her capacity for reigning alone. If she could spin a fine thread with a dainty hand, she could rule the domestics with a firm one ; and her pride did not come down readily to familiar intercourse with vulgar Mrs Leicester, whatever might be her relations with the encroaching widow's nephew.

Still less did the new master of the Oaklands, who wrote himself down " Thomas Venables, Gentleman," feel disposed to accept favours or familiarity from the tanner's sister. And had he known of any relationship existing between the Coppock family and Hugh Furnival, he would have closed his doors against her entrance.

CHAPTER II.

THE FATHER AND THE LOVER.

"GO to your wheel, girl, and let me hear no more of Hugh Furnival!" had been the command of Thomas Venables to his daughter six months before she dismounted at the Oaklands; "and, prithee, think no more of wedlock until a worthier man comes a-wooing to thee—a gentleman and no Jacobite!"

"I am afraid, sir," she answered, "you are blinded by prejudice. It is not right to judge of a man's worth by his politics or by his position."

"You are of no age to judge what is

right, Sybilla, and I am not wont to brook reply. Go to your wheel, and learn patience and docility therefrom."

Thus dismissed, after a sharp lecture, she had gone to her wheel, but the thread she spun was neither so even nor so fine as usual. Her father's tone had been unwontedly harsh and severe; there was neither patience nor obedience at her finger-tips; and there was something which might become rebellion in her heart.

"He is worthy as I—and I love him," was all she could say or think, and the wheel took it up like an echo, and went round and round to the tune.

And now let us look on this Hugh Furnival, who had furnished "Thomas Venables, Gentleman," with a crowning motive for uprooting his house-tree and planting it elsewhere; a motive so strong as to bar the door against all who were of the young man's kith and kin. Was he so notoriously a black sheep?

His own father did not think so; the new vicar did not think so; and if he had not

watched the farmer's son grow from boyhood to manhood, his predecessor had voluntarily led the youth through the intricacies of Greek and Latin, and the Rev. Joseph Ward found him an intelligent companion where such companions were few. The squires and farmers round about Prestbury said freely enough that he had been educated beyond the need or the general run of farmers' sons, and that Farmer Furnival would rue it; but he only laughed and said, Hugh had as much right to learning as had the two sons of his cousin Coppock, the Manchester tailor, both of whom had gone straight from the Manchester Grammar School to college, and taken honours there.

Hugh Furnival had a well-knit frame, stood five-feet ten in his stocking-feet, wore neither powder nor periwig, perhaps not so much because they were unsuited to his condition, as because he knew his own chesnut curls were a better setting for his handsome face, and matched his dark brown eyes, so full of fire and feeling.

Then, never a squire in the county was a better shot, or could ride to hounds against him; and where was the countryman who could throw him at a wrestling-bout, or keep an unbroken crown when he had the handling of a quarter-staff? And if he did aspire to wear gold-lace on his best three-cornered hat, there was none on his deep-flapped, buff waistcoat, or on his long-skirted coat, and only on Sundays did he buckle his breeches' knees and his shoes with silver instead of steel. Yet his father said he looked "as fine a fellow as ever stepped across a farm—or won a girl's heart."

Reasons these perchance for the blushes and prepossession of Miss Sybilla, but scarcely for the prejudice of Mr Venables against Hugh's very kith and kin, or for his assertion that he was "unworthy."

Yet the gentleman was not a man of rash judgment; and had the damsel shown no tendency to blush at Hugh's approach, Thomas Venables might have regarded him as a passable young fellow, a likely

successor to his father on the Spring-Holm Farm, and not have troubled himself about either his property, his pedigree, or his politics, not being given to meddle in what did not concern him.

But no sooner did a rumour reach him that "the fine young fellow" had been observed to visit the new vicar on the days Miss Venables went to the old-fashioned parsonage for instruction, than he put a sudden stop to the lessons, on a plea that she had "learning enough for a woman," and was wanted indoors now her mother was gone.

It was no new thing to see the son of Farmer Furnival uncovered in the ivy-clad church porch when they and the other gentry passed out into the ancient grave-yard, or for himself and daughter to acknowledge the customary deference with becoming courtesy. But it was new to observe glances cross, and faces flush, as civilities were exchanged, and to catch the echo of a whispered word in passing.

At once the gentleman drew his daughter's

mittened arm within his own, and held it there, as if he felt another hand was waiting to pluck it forth and bear her away; his brows contracted, and he flung at the presumptuous young farmer a look of haughty indignation, that said, with never a word spoken, "How dare you?"

And, as if in answer to a challenge, the younger eyes shot back their bold "I dare!"

Being taken to task, Sybilla admitted that Hugh Furnival had been wont to carry home her books from the vicar's and from church, when she was otherwise unattended; that he had now and again brought her posies from Spring-Holm; and that once they had strayed for half-an-hour along the winding banks of the River Bollin; but she would not admit that he was an improper associate for her father's child, even though she heard him stigmatised as a "lowborn lout" and a "traitorous Jacobite."

Scarcely reasons these to move a maiden of seventeen over whom the love of a handsome man had cast a glamour. Yet

Thomas Venables weighted them with his *will*, and expected them to serve her and the lover also into whose teeth he flung them discourteously two days later as an answer to his suit.

Nor did the vicar fare better when he essayed to put in a word for the young people.

"The Furnivals are rank Jacobites, sir! The whole family, root and branch!" was the irate answer. "Would you have me fling my precious Sybilla away on a plotting Jacobite, who may be hatching treason even now? Would you have me fling the girl's fortune into the Pretender's pouch? And there it would go if it got into Hugh Furnival's fingers, if he did not fling it into the gutter beforehand. Let him turn to the plough and marry the dairymaid, like his grandfather before him, instead of racing after the hounds as if he had gentle blood in his veins, or seeking a mate above his degree."

"Consider his education," urged the reverend gentleman mildly.

"Consider *what?* The art of agriculture is education for a farmer, sir! What have Greek and Latin done for Hugh Furnival but teach him to despise the honest industry of his parents, and set him agog to wield a sword — another Hector or Achilles. Say no more, sir. I can have no fellowship with upstart coxcombs, nor with Jacobites. Say no more, or I may suspect you to be tarred with the same brush."

The vicar, possibly conscience smitten, drew a quick breath, but said never a word more for the rejected suitor. It was dangerous even to be suspected, so bitter was the feeling of the time, so sharp the treatment of convicted Jacobites, as the adherents of James Stuart, the Pretender, were opprobriously called by the upholders of the House of Hanover and its representative, George the Second.

It was after this conversation with the vicar, which had somehow reached the ears of Sybilla, that she ventured a remonstrance with her sire, to be answered in the words with which this chapter opens.

And it having reached his ears that Hugh Furnival haunted the green lanes of Prestbury, and met his treasured Sybilla in spite of his interdict, he decided on doing promptly that which he had contemplated from the sad time of his wife's death.

He took all precaution to keep the whereabouts of his new estate secret, even riding ahead of the laden waggons as a guide, with Sybilla beside him. But he overlooked the necessity for hiring other waggons to supplement his own, and forgot that the drivers went back to their respective farms with the news. And he had made the mistake of pitching his tent too near the old encampment; and though defective roads, and want of roads, might double the distance between Prestbury and Timperley, what were eight or nine miles to one who could ride his horse bare-backed over hedge or ditch almost as the crow flies, when his spurs were love and exasperation.

To Sybilla, whose uneasy mind had

magnified the unknown miles they travelled so slowly, this removal seemed like transportation. She could only think of Hugh and his despair on finding that she had been spirited away; and, mingled with thoughts of Hugh, came bitter condemnation of her father's "cruelty" in severing them.

And as if aware of all that was working in the girl's mind like yeast, Thomas Venables strove to chase the shadows by cheerful allusions to their new home, and all he meant to do to make it pleasant.

He described to her the many-gabled house, the well-wooded lands, the winding water overhung with alder and willow, over which he proposed to throw a bridge for communication with the meadow and pasture beyond, of the great oaks which gave their name to the place, of the garden for her flowers, and that for kitchen produce, of the stables, the dairy, and all that could be supposed to interest a young housekeeper.

Then he spoke of neighbours at the

Halls of Timperley and Baguley, Riddings and Wythenshaw, of guests to be invited to a hospitable hearth, where she was to preside as queen; but he scarcely won her from her own unpleasant reflections on that forced separation from Hugh; and though she listened, it was with a spirit of resentment rather that satisfaction.

Mrs Leicester unquestionably startled her. But she thought the woman vulgar and intrusive, and it was not until afterwards that she learned to tolerate her as a living link between herself and distant Hugh. She was scarcely conscious how much the familiar mention of his name, and the knowledge that he had relations so close at hand, served to soften her harsh judgment of her really kind father, and contributed to the interest she took in the painting and stenciling, the arrangement of draperies, china, glass, and pictures; especially in the rooms which had been given up to her on request.

Pleased with her activity, glad to show that fatherly affection had alone been his

prompter, he had acquiesced readily enough, though a single apartment had served her hitherto.

"Well, well, Sybilla, if you prefer it to a sitting-room downstairs for your own work or study, when my company or that of my friends is undesirable" (a needful provision when to "drink deep" was the privilege of a gentlemen), "I am content, so long as you do not indulge in melancholy. But you will need more furniture for the room than the old spinster's wheel. How persistent Mrs Leicester was in pressing the wheel upon us as a gift, as though I could possibly accept such a favour from a mere stranger, and an inferior. The woman is well-meaning, no doubt; but she is ill-bred, and mistakes her own position."

"So I thought, sir, at first; but I fancy she only means to be civil and obliging, and I like her better than I did;" and Sybilla proceeded with her arrangement of china punch-bowls and silver drinking-cups on the oaken buffet in the dining-

room in silence, mentally asking herself whether she could have tolerated Mrs Leicester, apart from her association with Hugh Furnival?

Mr Venables was too reserved and proud to dine in the common hall with his servants at the same board as his predecessor at the Oaklands had done, and as had been the wont with his own forefathers at Prestbury. Indeed, the custom was still so general that he was looked upon as an innovator, and his "pride" contemned accordingly.

They had been some seven weeks in Timperley, and Sybilla had begun to fancy her father had forgotten his promise; the last paint brush had done its work; his few fine pictures had found places on the panelled walls; his books—classical, historical, and controversial—were on their shelves; the great clock had been set going in the hall; the servants' quarters were in order likewise; every pewter dish and platter was freshly polished, and in its place; every wooden trencher scrub-

bed white and in array; the oaken settle shone as brightly in the house-place as the chairs and tables in the dining-room and parlour; the servants had gone to bed (along with the sun), and Sybilla was saying "Good-night" to her father at the head of the front staircase, when he held her hand for a moment, and, with a smile, said,—

"Busk yourself for a ride in the morning, Sybilla. You know that Tuesday is the Altringham market-day, and as it bids fair to be fine, I intend you to accompany me to select the furniture for your private sitting-room. Josh will have the horses at the door by the time breakfast is over."

Sybilla's eyes had been heavy of late, but they brightened as she thanked him; and seeing that she was pleased, the stern man, from whom such signs of affection were rare, pressed a kiss upon her brow, smoothed a hand over her falling hair, and murmured "God bless thee!" A spontaneous outburst of repressed emotion, saying much for the inner feelings of the

father, at a period when it was not considered seemly to display parental attachment openly. It was supposed that familiarity with a child led to contempt and disobedience.

He turned into his chamber, well satisfied and content, in that she was pleased. She passed on to her own room softened and elate, and stood looking out of the window, whilst the shadow deepened over the landscape, in a better frame of mind than had been hers for many a day.

Her father's caress had been more to her than the promise he had made, and that held elements of delightful anticipation.

What young lady would not have been gratified by such marks of kindness even in these days when parents concede so much to their offspring, and varying fashion clamours for frequent changes. Then, the furniture of one generation was handed down to the next, to be again transmitted, and this entirely new fitting up for her sole use was an event indeed.

Ay, an event on which hung events

unforeseen either by father or daughter, or neither would have sat down to breakfast so serenely.

Josh had the horses groomed and in readiness; Ursula stood in the porch to receive the last orders of her young mistress, and to assist in the modest adjustment of her small riding-hoop, which projected over the hips like a pair of panniers, with no lower frame-work; and she having drawn her black silk mantua closer round her shoulders, rode off beside her father, with as sunny a smile under the brim of the flat hat she wore tied down over her ears as he himself could wish.

He had unbuttoned two flaps of his three-cornered hat, to shield his eyes from the sun, and from under the brim he watched every change of her speaking countenance, proud of her grace and beauty, glad for her gladness, and rejoicing in the success of his scheme to blot her unsuitable lover from her memory; and he smiled upon her in his grave manner as he gazed.

Mrs Leicester's cottage lay on their

route just where the road branched off to Altringham and Bowdon. It was a veritable bower of honeysuckle and roses; and, before they reached the low wooden gate, they saw the dame by the side of her bee-hives, hooped and hooded as if equipped for a walk, but apparently watching her bees as they went and came industriously, dived into the nectary of a flower, or brushed the pollen from their coats to fill their little pockets—and it might be, her big ones.

"Come, Sally, lass, how long dos't mean to be?" called in no measured tones, told that she was simply waiting for a stout serving woman, in a blue linen overgown and petticoat, who made her appearance with a huge wicker-basket on her arm.

The muffled beat of hoofs on the dusty road had not been heard until they were all close to the garden gate, where they made a pause, and she seemed well-pleased to greet them—the master of the Oaklands and his daughter, who travelled with a man-servant in their rear.

"I am wanting some good wool. Pray can you tell me where I can be best served?" asked Sybilla, before they rode away.

"Well, you're off to Altringham, I reckon; so I'll maybe meet you in the market, and I can take you to th' wool-comber's where Bess got hers. You'll happen put your beasts up at th' 'Unicorn,' sir?"

Mr Venables assented.

"Well, four legs go faster than two, and I've my markets to make when I get there, but after noon I'm at your service, miss, and we can keep a look-out for one another, and maybe you'll find me *useful* before the day's out."

She was thanked and they rode on, Mr Venables remarking, affably enough, "I think the good dame is well-meaning, though somewhat too free in her manner." But Sybilla fancied there was some hidden meaning in her concluding words, and wondered if they covered a rebuke or a sarcasm.

Only for a moment did Mrs Leicester

look after them, with her brown hand shading the peculiar expression of her grey eyes. Then, snapping the gate behind her, she followed at a brisk pace, regardless of the heat, urging on her attendant.

The scene was new to Sybilla, who patted the sleek neck of her horse when under her father's pilotage he had carried her, unscared by the noise, in safety through the crowd and hubbub to the stone horse-block by the "Unicorn," a good inn at the wider end of the triangular market-place. There the obedient animal's head was held by Josh, and drawn alongside that his mistress might alight. Gracefully she stepped from the saddle to the stone, and stood erect in her proud beauty.

For a moment she looked around as if in quest of someone scarcely hoped for. Then pressing her lips close to keep back a sigh, she came down the steps of the block, with a firm resolve to dismiss that "someone" from her thoughts, and obey the father who was doing so much to prove his love for her.

Josh led away the horses, and she, holding fast by her father's arm, traversed with him the lively market-place and made sundry purchases; then went from one tradesman's shop to another to order or select furniture of the newest mode, including curtains and a square of carpet, and that other luxury a Venetian glass, in a walnut-wood frame, to hang between the windows; all, in short, that could make her sitting-room bright and pleasant; the presence of the large spinning-wheel fastened against the wall as a coach-wheel on an axle, not being then considered an incongruity.

There were greetings in the market-place. Cheshire is noted for its landed gentry, its stalwart men, its good-looking women; but amongst them Sybilla seemed to attract peculiar attention, whether as a stranger or for her especial comeliness.

Yet of the many jolly squires and yeomen who accosted Thomas Venables, he presented but two to his daughter. These,

he told her, were neighbours. Squire Gerard, of Riddings, a moated grange outside Altringham, of which the young squire, who had been on his travels, had recently taken possession; and young Tatton, of Wyvenshaw, an historic old mansion beyond Timperley, both of whom seemed inclined to cultivate the acquaintance.

Many years had gone by since Mr Venables had attended a market encumbered with a female; his wife had been a stay-at-home, and he found his daughter somewhat of a charge, as well as a fetter on his own free movements, proud as he was of the attention she attracted.

He appeared no little relieved when after luncheon he espied Mrs Leicester from one of the windows of the "Unicorn," as she came bustling up, as fast as her inflated hoop would allow. Very gladly did he then resign Sybilla to her care, whilst he went about business of his own.

I ween he would have left his own

business undone could he have had an inkling of Mrs Leicester's business.

Surely enough she led Miss Venables to the wool-comber's, and helped her to choose and bargain for her wool, as she had promised.

And as surely, there too, was found a fine young farmer, with fleeces for the wool-comber, and the young farmer was Hugh Furnival.

CHAPTER III.

SYBILLA'S SUITORS.

SYBILLA had eaten her luncheon at the "Unicorn" in the best of spirits, and although somewhat abashed by the attentions of Squire Gerard, who had accompanied them thither, she could think only of her father's lavish outlay for her gratification, and of her own grateful duty towards him.

Overpowered by his affectionate generosity, taken too by surprise, she was brimming over with dutiful affection and wise resolves to bring her own will into subjection to her good and loving father's in the one matter wherein they were at

variance, and sat in the window seat with her elbow on the ledge and her cheek upon her palm, deciding that she would see Hugh Furnival no more—when, alas! for her resolution, Mrs Leicester came in sight, broke the thread of thought, and carried her away.

Innocently and unsuspiciously she entered the wool-comber's. Their talk by the way had been of the market prices of wool and flax, and such matters. When Mrs Leicester opened the half-door (the upper half was hooked to the low ceiling), she walked as it were into a trap. She saw only the dealer in wool, and with the aid of her guide made her purchase, and had turned to go when Hugh's handsome face met hers.

There was a conflict between love and filial obedience, a special pleader within to second the eloquent eyes and low-toned voice of Hugh, as he urged that he should grow reckless and rush to destruction if she abandoned him, promising to wait patiently until her father withdrew his

interdict, if she would only meet him now and again to keep hope alive—meet him at his aunt Leicester's.

"And surely there can be no harm in that, miss," put in the wily feminine match-maker, whose sharp ears had been on the alert.

"No harm in deceiving my father?" murmured Sybilla, shrinking back.

"It would only be for a time, sweet one; he loves you too well to withhold consent for ever."

"Ah, yes, he doth love me well; but—" only a sigh finished the speech, and, if her hand was in his warm clasp, her eyes sought the ground, afraid to look up into his beseeching ones.

"You cannot wish to break my heart?" whispered Hugh, bending near to her. "Separation is worse than death to me; I cannot live without a word or sight of you, my dearest one. You will kill me with denial. If you love me do not say me nay.'

And with such pleading, in tones meant for her ear and heart alone, she was won

over, Mrs Leicester keeping the woolcomber discreetly apart, bundling up the wool for convenience of carriage the while.

Sybilla had entered the low shop fearless and free. She left it fettered with stronger bonds and burthened with a secret, and a sense of treachery towards the father who had only that very day loaded her with favours.

The homeward ride late in the afternoon had none of the morning's cheeriness. Grey masses of cloud seemed to rise up behind and follow them, and their steeds being turned towards the west, the setting sun sent a crimson glare into their faces from between long bars of purple and black. There was scarcely a twitter from the trees or hedge-rows; now and then was heard a faint cricket-like chirp, but whether from the golden-crested wren or the lively insect, it could not be distinguished for the beat of hoofs. Either a black-cap or a nightingale hushed its evensong on their approach, but the air was

close and still, and the leaves had scarce a quiver. A ghost-moth from the meadows flew across their track, and now and then a brimstone-moth fluttered about, as if waking for the night. But Sybilla noted none of these. She was lively and depressed by fits, and sat her horse somewhat wearily.

"Thou art over-tired, Sybilla, lass. It has been an exciting day for thee," remarked her father kindly, attributing her long stretch of silence to fatigue.

A sigh accompanied the faint "Ay, father," of her assent.

"Ah," said he, "the air is close and oppressive. I think we are threatened with a storm. It is well we are nigh at home."

They were at home; and Sybilla, pleading "fatigue" (the suggestion of her father), had retired to rest after their early supper, before the elemental storm burst over Timperley; but another storm threatened, which might be longer in gathering, yet would be far more scathing and destructive to the inmates of the Oaklands.

Sybilla had retired to her room, but not to rest. She paced the floor in unwonted agitation. She had given a promise to Hugh in defiance of her father's will and open interdict. And she could no longer justify her disobedience with the pretext of parental cruelty. Had she not found him most kind and indulgent in all but where Hugh Furnival was concerned. She knew she had done wrong, and had not strength of mind or will to right it.

The storm without seemed to mock the tumult in her breast. She shrank from the blinding lightning flashes, and huddled on a chair, covered up her head to shut them out, with a sort of fear that the angry voice of God was thundering to her.

But she never threw herself upon her knees to beseech pardon, or to ask for guidance, or to be delivered from temptation; and morning found her little more composed.

At the breakfast-table the next morning her customary platter of oatmeal-porridge and bowl of new milk went away almost

untasted. She drank the coffee, which was there as a luxury, like one who feels the need of a refreshing draught; but rejected alike the hung beef and the brawn with which her father heartily supplemented his porridge.

"What ails thee, Sybilla?" cried Thomas Venables at length; "squeamish appetites are not for healthy country maidens, and thou'rt pecking like a bird," and he looked across at her with much concern.

"The storm kept me awake last night; and I have a headache," was her excuse; but it was not made without hesitation or change of countenance, for though the headache was real enough, the plea was not, and she was new at deception.

"Then give thy orders to the maids, Syb, and come out of doors with me. The fresh air will do thee good, and thou canst tell me how thou wouldst have thy garden laid out. It was all very well for a thrifty farmer like spinster Coppock to turn every rod of land to account, and plant nothing thereon but what would serve for the pot

or the market. But a young lady of fair estate and good breeding must have her sweet-smelling posies, her stocks and her gilliflowers, her roses and lilies, her lawn and summer-bower, her shady walk when the sun is hot, and evergreens to cheat winter of its gloom. Is it not so, Syb ?"

Sybilla was reaching her garden hat from the antlers in the hall, and he saw not her face as she answered, "Ay, father, ay," with something rising in her throat, as if to choke her.

"I will join you directly in the court-yard, when I have spoken to Ursula," she said, turning into the house-place or servants' hall, whilst he passed out at a door, near the back stairs, to the court-yard in the rear.

She found him in the garden with Josh, who was lamenting the overgrowth of weeds, and explaining the necessity for employing a younger back than his own or that of his assistant, to stoop and grub them up.

"There's a sharp little chap hanging

about th' gate now, as 'ud be glad o' th' job, measter; an' he'd be downreet weel paid wi' a penny an' some o' them praties yo're gooin' to hev dug up to mak' th' lawn, they'd hauf o' them goo to th' pigs."

"Who is the lad?" asked Mr Venables.

"Whoi, he says as his feyther's a wayver, an' lives o' th' Moor, an' they're nigh clemmin', for he conna' get warps enow for his loom sin' Bess Coppock died. Yo' see, mestur, theere beant spinners enow to keep th' wayvers a-gooin', naether here nor i' Manchester; and if they canna' get th' woo' they canna' wark."

Sybilla, standing by her father's side, had heard Josh's adroit plea to serve the lad and save his own back at the same time; and shocked at the word "clemmin'," wondered that her father should hesitate a moment between feeding the pigs with the spare potatoes and a family. Potatoes had not come to be reckoned the porker's proper food—parings and refuse only fell to their share; to give them more would be deemed waste.

As she said so, she added, "There may soon be work for the weaver if I and the maids are industrious."

"Right, Syb," answered her father; "right! Encourage industry, and pay well for work done; but don't encourage idleness with too much charity. Call the lad in, Josh, and if he be willing to work, he shall be paid both with pence and potatoes. Neither we nor the hogs will miss them."

A barefooted, ragged urchin, not more than eight years old, whose hair was bleached by capless exposure to the sun, and whose cheeks told their own tale of short commons, answered the sharp "Hi, thee!" of Josh, and the beckoning wave of his arm.

He was a little fellow to be set to work, but he seemed glad enough of the chance; he shrank from the hard questioning of Mr Venables, but when Sybilla sent him to Ursula for a breakfast of brown bread and buttermilk, with a pitiful smile on her face, he thought her little less than an angel.

And when, after a hard day's weeding,

Billy Barnes went home, with as many new potatoes as he could carry, and the young lady compassionately added a silver groat to the penny he had earned, and sent a promise of future work for the father, he could only describe her as "like an angel out o' church winder."

But he had his day's weeding before him when Thomas Venables led his daughter over the grounds, still wet with the late rainfall, noting what improvements he designed, and—marvel for him—seeking her opinion thereon. They had reached the pea and potato plot, lying between the side of the house and the water, and had decided on the space to be converted into a grassy lawn or bowling-green, and then he turned, saying,—

"And now, Sybilla, whereabouts should we have the bridge? It might save thee wetting thy feet in crossing to thy flower garden and the meadow beyond, and I fear the stepping-stones are slippery and unsafe for thee. The heavy storm has laid them under water now."

At every step fresh proofs of his desire to beautify the Oaklands for *her* had been apparent; and this last token of thoughtful care in the parent she had been led to regard as arbitrary and severe, was more than she could bear, and conscience became urgent.

Two minutes more and she would have made confession of her error. Ah, how often a life's destiny hangs on one moment, one unspoken word!

Her father's "Hillo! who's here?" arrested the words ere they reached her lips, and they were never so ready again.

Squire Gerard, who had come riding down Wood Lane at a trot, stopped his horse at the gate, doffed his gold-laced hat, and bowed low in salutation.

He was hospitably invited to enter. His apologies for splashes contracted in the muddy lanes and turbid streams were accepted.

Josh called an underling to take charge of the gentleman's horse, and soon the master of Riddings was seated at a table

covered with grass-bleached damask of Sybilla's own spinning, evidently thinking more of the graceful hostess than of the game-pie, or capon, or Cheshire cheese, or the well-filled silver tankards, or any other adjunct of that early luncheon.

Then followed a stroll through the grounds with Sybilla in company. He listened to his host's detail of intended improvements; had something to say of the land, and the crops it would bear; suggested a line of shrubbery on the far side of the water, between the flower-beds and the meadow; and put in a word for a durable bridge of stone or brick for general use, rather than the wooden one in Mr Venable's mind; but his glances followed Sybilla's movements, and from time to time he drew her into the conversation, as if it were a pleasure to hear her speak.

He was a man little, if any, older than Hugh Furnival, had travelled much, and was a conversable companion; but he had not the like attractions of form and feature,

and there was more of sadness than of fire in his deep-set eyes.

As he said, he had known much sorrow; had returned to the Riddings after long absence, to find that he was the last of his race; and the face of his father's old friend, in the Altringham market-place, was a welcome sight to him. But Gerard looked as if the old friend's daughter had been a still more welcome sight. His glance seemed to follow her every movement, as if fascinated.

He lingered, as if loth to depart, until indeed the arrival of a cart with the purchases of the previous day warned the young squire to take leave.

That visit was but the precursor of many more, a hearty welcome from Mr Venables being sure to greet him, even if Sybilla was not always to be seen.

Young Tatton also came riding across the moor from Wyvenshaw; but his fox-hunting proclivities were not much in accord with the grave and studious habits of Mr Venables, and his reception was

of another sort than was accorded to Gerard.

He not only came often, but he stayed long, and was a favourite, especially with the father, in whose improvements he took all the interest of a fellow landowner; then, he was always ready in an afternoon or evening to play a game at backgammon with him, in hope of a song from Sybilla, or a tune on her spinet, and well content to watch her knitting-pins flash or her spinning-wheel revolve, under the impulse of her slender fingers, if so be he could only win a word or a smile from her sweet lips by times.

Yet as only the brightly-polished flax-wheel was portable, and as the wool-wheel was a fixture against the wall of her private sitting-room, the one being a mere toy compared with the other, and as she had taken to wool-spinning with an earnestness which Thomas Venables construed into forgetfulness of Hugh Furnival, it often served to excuse her absence from the household-room when the two men were occupied with

politics, or the backgammon board, or the popular game of fox and goose.

And this occurred more frequently than either approved, and generally when Mrs Leicester happened to have stepped in to see Miss Venables.

By this time the portly widow had contrived to obtain a familiar footing in the house; her offer to improve Sybilla's acquaintance with her new wheel having opened the path. Mrs Leicester was always obliging, she was a near neighbour, and Mr Venables was well pleased that his daughter should take interest in anyone and anything—except Hugh Furnival—and he tolerated the widow for the sake of his child, hoping that companionship would prevent brooding over the past.

He would have preferred a younger friend for her, either Miss Tatton, or Miss Legh from Baguley, but he did not interfere with the girl's choice; and was rather pleased than otherwise that she carried her portly person and free manners where they did not jar on his personal sensibilities.

He had no suspicion, not he, that when Sybilla carried her sewing or her knitting to Mrs Leicester's cottage now and then, or when the latter came to the Oaklands, and, after a gossip, retreated with Sybilla to her own room, whence the musical hum of the big wheel could be heard by all in that portion of the eccentric and rambling house, that either was a cover for a meeting with Hugh Furnival. Still less, that the beguiling widow artfully kept the humming wheel in motion once or twice whilst Sybilla, at her suggestion, slipped down the secluded and rarely-used staircase, close by her room door, for a hurried interview with the nephew, waiting under the shadow of the twilight and the trees.

Had the young creature, so ignorant of the world, so easily led by her affections, but confessed to her father the promise extracted from her in a moment of surprise and weakness, he would have kept Mrs Leicester and her false advice at bay, would have been at once adviser, shield, and sup-

port to his child. But at the time Sybilla's heart prompted the admission of her error, she could not overcome her awe of his outward austerity, and no such opportune moment ever came again.

As it was, that first meeting with Hugh at his aunt's cottage—in itself a surrender of filial duty and obedience—served to undermine resolution and right feeling. Not all at once, but one meeting led to another, and another followed that.

Mrs Leicester, in her nephew's interest, argued away the girl's right-minded scruples, and impassioned Hugh, who came rushing across country at the risk of his neck for half-an-hour's speech with her, either in the grounds or at his aunt's cottage, was hardly to be gainsaid.

"Do you think a woman of my years would sanction anything that was wrong?" was asked by the cunning and unscrupulous widow as an argument for these clandestine meetings.

"It is cruel to deny me a few minutes, when I come so far and love you so dearly,"

was the lover's plea; whilst the arm round her waist and the eloquent lips and eyes had other arguments as strong.

"You can meet that fellow Gerard at Bowdon church, walk home by his side, listen to him, talk to him, sing to him, yet you grudge me a stolen half-hour after weeks of pain and absence. If I do not see you, I can hear of it, and there are times in my desperation I feel as if I could shoot the fellow, so happy in your smiles," he said, when ere long jealousy added fuel to the fire of Hugh's passion.

Few and weeks apart were these stealthy interviews, and chiefly in the shady parlour behind the beehives at Mrs Leicester's; but letters came and went, and not always through the same feminine courier.

Little Billy Barnes, who now rejoiced in a pair of clogs and a warm suit of home-spun, and who flourished under the united patronage of Josh and Miss Venables, and who somewhere or somehow had imbibed a wholesome dread of her stern and dark-browed sire, carried more than one billet

in his breeches' pocket; and the little lad, who worshipped the flaxen-haired beauty, would have died rather than betray his trust even to his own father, whose loom was once more at work; for Ursula kept the maids at their wheel as busily as their mistress at hers.

Then when with the waning year night shadows crept on, and outdoor labour ceased earlier, Hugh urged that there was less fear of observation, and then she might surely meet him more frequently. I will not say Sybilla had no misgivings, but they were silenced.

Not altogether. In the solitude of her own sitting-room, brightened by her father's care, when the large wheel of her predecessor hummed its loudest, and she stepped backward and forward drawing out and twining her delicate line of woollen yarn, there was often an undertone of reproach in its music. Or when seated in the glow of the fire on the open hearth, opposite to her father, engrossed in a book or his accounts—or in the summer bower he had delicately created

for her pleasure—she knitted in silence, there was often a voice in her heart accusing her of duplicity in knitting hose for her father in his sight, and for her lover in the privacy of her own room. It was as though she alternated between two loves, or it may be between love and duty.

And so the seasons came and went, and with them guests to the Oaklands; but none so frequently as Squire Gerard, the one of whom her secret lover was so jealous.

Ay, long before that summer evening, when Sybilla's father laid down his volume and broke the silence with a composed announcement that their gallant neighbour, who had been her devotee so many months, was desirous to make her the mistress of Riddings Hall.

She started to her feet. Her knitting dropped to the floor and became the kitten's prey.

"You cannot mean it! Oh, father, remember Hugh!"

"Remember the scheming Jacobite? I thought thou hadst forgotten him ere this?"

"Forgotten Hugh! Oh, sir, that is impossible!" she murmured, holding by the tall chair-back for support.

Her father's dark brows contracted, and the old stern look she had not seen so long, came back to his face. Yet was there a curl of doubt on his lips as he said, "Nothing is impossible. Calf-love is not eternal. Hugh Furnival has forgotten thee, and the new wooer will make amends for the old one."

A denial of Hugh's inconstancy rose to her lips, but died away in a faint "Nay, nay!"

"And I say *yea*, Syb. So look your best when the squire comes for his answer, and speak to him kindly, like a good and dutiful daughter."

She always did look her best in the bewildered eyes of the young squire, until that bright morning in August, when she met his stammering love-suit with an agitated entreaty that he would not persecute her.

He had been prepared for some reserve,

which would wear away in time; and all he could answer was, "I do not want to persecute or hurry you, Miss Venables; I would not trouble your mind for the world. Give me but the shadow of hope. I can wait."

This was more than she could do, but still he hoped—and waited.

"Patience and a good cause win in the long-run. The lass is only shy," was the solace Thomas Venables gave to the disconcerted suitor as they stood together on the red brick bridge, which had superseded the old stepping-stones, and Gerard looked ruefully on his own melancholy visage in the smooth water below. "Take my word for it, Sybilla will consent to be thy wife before this year's swallows take flight."

And for lack of better assurance, the devoted suitor took what comfort he could from the confident father's word, and waited with tolerable patience.

Squire Gerard's horse could have brought his master to the Oaklands blindfold, so often was he stabled and fed there

before the swallows took wing. And the patient wooer came and went, or lingered by the side of Sybilla, whether she tended her flowers or sat silent sewing a seam ; content so long as he met with no open rebuff.

But long before the first swallow plumed its wings for flight, another bird had flown its parent nest.

The loud neighing of a horse in the lane, and the barking of the mastiff by the gate, had roused Mr Venables out of his first sleep one night, at the close of September ; but the horseman rode off, and he turned on his pillow and went to sleep again, only thinking some of his neighbours kept late hours.

Miss Venables was wont to rise with the lark. When Ursula went to her room for the keys in the morning, no Sybilla was there—only a letter.

Trembling and quaking in every limb, the old servant carried it at arm's length to her master, and as she told Josh afterwards, "I thought he'd ha' stiffened to stone at the sight on it."

He had crushed the tear-stained letter in his strong grip, as he set his teeth behind close lips; but then he smoothed it carefully out, not relaxing a muscle of his rigid face; and, when Gerard came a few hours later, it was flung to him in answer to his inquiries for Miss Venables.

It was the deluded father's only explanation. Then he tore the letter into shreds. Of pursuit he would not hear.

"By this time she has ceased to be Sybilla Venables, and no longer belongs to me," was said, sternly.

He locked the door of the rifled room upon her spinning-wheel and all besides, saying, as he turned the key,—

"Disobedience brings its own punishment. Let me never hear the ingrate's name again under this roof. I have closed the door of my heart as I have closed the door of this room, never to be opened more."

It was spoken as the mandate of a despot. Indisputable and irrevocable, as a decree of the Medes and Persians.

CHAPTER IV.

LIFE AT SPRING-HOLM FARM.

UNDER the rule of Cromwell and the Commonwealth the English law of marriage was most stringent. At the Restoration — with many another law for the preservation of order—it was relaxed, until it became so loose that all the formality necessary to make a marriage binding was the performance of the ceremony by a man in holy orders ; it mattered not when or where. Gross abuses led, in 1753, to Parliamentary enactments against clandestine marriages, and since then other Acts have been passed to regulate and define a legal marriage.

But when Sybilla Venables, after long hesitation, allowed herself to be over-persuaded, and stealing down the secluded back staircase like a ghost at midnight, and across the deserted courtyard in the full light of the harvest moon, and only paused to reflect for one moment on the bridge built in fatherly love, as she crossed it in her flight to the meadow gate, well away from the restless mastiff—when she thus quitted her confiding father's roof in silence and secrecy, there were no such restrictions.

There were, however, restrictions upon intercourse and correspondence. Only the larger towns could boast the luxury of a post-office ; and, albeit a market-town, with a staple trade, and governed by a mayor, Altringham, which had no church of its own, was scarcely likely to have a post-office. Even half-a-century later it had only a receiving-house for the post at Knutsford, eight miles away. Those few who had the need and the ability to write letters were compelled to entrust them to

private messengers or the public carriers; and, when addressed to an out-of-the-way place like Timperley, have them left at some ordinary house of call, and trust to the chapter of accidents for delivery when unexpected—and, consequently, unasked for.

Thus, the packet containing the respectful and apologetic letters of Hugh and Sybilla Furnival—written the very day after their marriage at Prestbury Church, and carried to Altringham by Hugh the following market-day—remained for weeks where it was stuck, along with others, in the leaden frame-work of the glass screen round the bar of the "Unicorn."

Hugh had depended on Mrs Leicester to become the bearer of this packet, and had sought her out for the purpose; but, although she had done her utmost to bring matters to this issue, she discreetly declined to make her complicity known. Nay, she went so far as to say that Hugh had been precipitate, and had carried matters further than ever *she* had expected; and, when

brought shortly to book by her nephew, boldly declared she thought he would have asked the old gentleman's consent, and not have carried his treasure off on the sly. She had disclaimed all knowledge of the affair to Ursula, she owned, and it would never do to carry their letters and prove herself a go-between at last.

Hugh stood aghast at her barefaced double-dealing. With a muttered something that was not a blessing, he turned on his heel in search of another messenger; and, finding no one sufficiently trustworthy who was willing to undertake the embassy and brave Thomas Venables' displeasure, he carried the bulky missive to the "Unicorn," and paid the customary fee for its display against the dim pane, nothing doubting it would reach his new father-in-law in a week or so.

Farmers came in week by week, and country squires, who read the superscription and shrugged their shoulders, for the story of the runaway match had spread far and wide; but Thomas Venables had never

crossed the threshold of the inn or shown his face in Altringham from the day his idolised daughter had disgraced herself and him by her flight.

He kept within his own grounds and excluded visitors, a stern, self-contained man, whose contracted brows alone told the pain within.

To Squire Gerard alone were his gates freely open, and to him not so much for converse as for companionship. They had both loved the same object, and lost. Her name was never mentioned between them, but they looked in each other's faces, grasped each other's hands, and knew their sympathy was mutual.

There had been the like sensitive disinclination for "greetings in the market-place," and the free questions and comments of other men. For those were days of coarse jest and badinage, when no wound was sacred from rough handling.

The younger man was by nature the more elastic, and the sooner inclined to seek relief in crowds. It was he who

found the packet addressed to "Thomas Venables, Esquire," in the bar window of the "Unicorn," a month after it had been placed there, and volunteered to carry it to the Oaklands.

But the intelligence conveyed in the long-delayed missives—that Sybilla was the wife of Hugh Furnival, had been united to him in Prestbury Church by his cousin, the Rev. Thomas Coppock, who had journeyed from Manchester to perform the ceremony—had been rudely anticipated, and all there was of deferential entreaty for reconciliation was lost. It was too late.

Altringham's one lawyer was closeted with Mr Venables in his library, when the squire—who bore his own disappointment manfully—entered. A marriage certificate and other papers lay on the table.

"See, Gerard," cried the old man bitterly, "that harpy Furnival has not long waited to lay his claws on the three thousand pounds her uncle left the girl!" He did not say "Sybilla." "Well, she has flung

herself away ; let the money go after her. And tell them, sir" (to the attorney), "to make the most of it, for not one penny-piece will she have of mine, now or ever! The ingrate!"

"I found this at the 'Unicorn,' sir. It has been lying there a month at least," said the squire, with a stifled sigh, handing him the package. "I think it is from—from —*her.*"

A bright fire was blazing between the brass dogs on the hearth. Barely was the superscription glanced at when the unopened package was flung into the flames, and all that might perchance have softened his austerity smouldered to ashes.

The intervention and remonstrance of the other two were of no avail.

Gerard's love was of a noble order, and he endeavoured to effect a reconciliation.

He might as well have tried persuasion to a rock.

The certificate was pushed across the table to the squire of Riddings.

"Coppock!" exclaimed he ; "surely not

the young parson I saw at the tanner's a while back ?"

"Ay," answered Mr Venables grimly ; "a nephew of his, the son of the man who made my coats when I cared to pay for fashion. The nephew of the woman whose house I now hold."

"Was not Mrs Leicester a Coppock ?" put the squire meditatively, the paper still in his hand.

"Ay," jerked out the exasperated father ; "and I hear, now it is too late, that they are kin to the Furnivals. There has been a plot, a vile plot, to rob me of my child's duty and affection ; and that woman Leicester coming and going, with her smooth face, has been the prime mover from first to last ! *She* comes here no more." There was a brief pause ; then, turning to the lawyer, he went on, in changed tones, slowly and deliberately, as if delivering a fiat,—"In three days, master lawyer, have the transfer-deed in readiness, and a quittance for all that is hard cash. I will trouble you to make my will at the same

time—and *here.* Good day!" and the lawyer was dismissed.

By the following Saturday Sybilla's own fortune had passed into the hands of her husband, and her father had disinherited *her;* had made a will which did not even contain her name.

If Mrs Leicester had any ulterior motive beyond love for her own nephew, she had made a mistake, had done her own business effectually. The gate of the Oaklands was barred against her. Mr Venables passed her by in the lanes, or in the church porch, without recognition, though she curtsied low; and, to her further mortification, the tanner's wife was there to see!

To Sybilla it was all heartbreaking. She had run counter to her father's will, deluded into the belief that his love was too strong to cast her off; that she had only to sue for forgiveness and obtain pardon; that she would be recalled, and Hugh with her; and that all would end happily as a fairy tale.

With the making of her father's will, and

his stern message, all her bright hopes of reconciliation died out, and she stood aghast with dismay.

Her first impulse was to gallop off to Timperley and force herself into his presence, but Hugh restrained her.

"Why should you abase yourself only to be spurned?" he asked. "Would you go to hear your husband maligned? Leave him alone. He will come round in time. So show a brave front, Sybilla mine;" and with his kisses and caresses he strove to chase her compunctions.

He assured her he loved her, not her money, and cared little if her father cut her off without a shilling. There would be good days coming ere long, when he would carve a fortune for her, and, may be, win the Oaklands to boot, in spite of parchment. A covert allusion to the return of the exiled Stuarts to the throne, which she well understood.

Sybilla was somewhat bewildered between her father's loyalty to the king upon the throne, and her husband's loyalty to

the king without a kingdom ; but the fire and enthusiasm in Hugh's handsome face and glowing speech carried her with him, if not to conviction.

They were still living at Spring-Holm farm when Hugh came home from Altringham laden with coin and credentials for the remainder of his wife's three thousand pounds ; and there is no doubt the cash in hand tended to soothe the irritation and ill-humour visible in Farmer Furnival and his dame at the disinheritance of the "lady-wife Hugh had brought home to them with no more clothes than would fill a pair o' saddle-bags." But their equanimity was speedily disturbed.

So long as Sybilla could build on a recall home to all her possessions *there*, she resisted her husband's offer to replenish her scanty wardrobe. But now that the last hope was dispelled, and that he had means of her own at command, she was as anxious to equip herself as any other bride.

A horse was saddled, Hugh mounted Sybilla on a pillion behind him, they forded

the bright Bollin, where is now a bridge of many arches, and rode off to Macclesfield the next market-day to visit the mercer's, and mantua-maker's, and cordwainer's. And so proud was he of his bride, and so anxious that she should not feel she had married beneath her, that he was lavish rather than wise in the choice of materials and habiliments, over-ruling her better judgment.

Moreover, Sybilla rode back to Spring-Holm on a horse he had bought for her own use, with a fine new saddle.

There were glum looks in the farm kitchen that night.

"Marry come up! Would nothing suit my lady but a horse to ride, and silks and furbelows, as if she had married the squire?"

"She brought the money to buy them, and has a right to have them," answered Hugh testily.

"Thou'll soon gallop the money away, my lad, at the pace thou'rt going," his father put in.

"Ay! and plain linen and linsey might serve the turn of a farmer's wife, if she had a tabinet for Sundays, without fal-lals. An' be those fine shoes, with roses and high heels, to carry her into the shippons a-milking?" questioned the dame sarcastically.

"Sybilla milk! That's Betty's work!" cried the young man sharply.

"And why not Sybilla's. Be she too fine or too proud to milk a cow?"

"Neither too fine nor too proud to be useful. But I'll not have her asked to milk the cows."

"Hoity-toity, now! A farmer's wife and not milk a cow! Thou's brought thy pigs to a pretty market."

This was the first altercation between Hugh and the old people over his "lady-wife," but by no means the last. And they were not carried on in undertones to spare Sybilla's ears; and not all Hugh's fondness or all his care could shield her from rude shocks.

There is a good deal of rough and slop-

ping work about a farmhouse, and Sybilla did not care to handle a mop and pail, any more than to carry a brimming milk-pail on her head to the dairy; and the good dame thought her squeamish.

She would have helped the dame with her cookery; but there her very skill was at fault. "What good be kickshaws for hungry men?" was asked; and her delicate pastry was pronounced "nothing to bite at."

"Get to thy wheel, lass!" the old woman would say; "thou'rt fit for nothing in the 'varsal world but to spin."

And Sybilla, who had ruled so proudly and ably her father's household, with servants to do her bidding, and friends to say "Well done!" sat down to spin her flaxen thread, or pace backwards and forwards drawing out the yarn of wool, with a monotonous hum and burr-r-r in her ears that was no longer a song of hope or joy, but a dreary, wearisome drone, which seemed like a wail for the years that were gone and the home she had forsaken.

There she was loved and respected, her

own mistress and that of others, to whom her word was law; *there* she had a private room for work or recreation (she did not say "devotion"); *there* were more books than she cared to read; *there* was her sweet spinet wherewith to while away a vacant hour, and so win her father's thanks; *there*, too, she had the constant interchange of thought with a man of birth and breeding; *there* she was courted and admired.

Here all, save Hugh, were coarse and unmannerly, and her very refinement was held in contempt; *here* her domestic arts and accomplishments were rated as below the skill of the lowest drudge on the farm; books and music were not—she had been told "the best spinet was a cheese-press;" *here* she was a wife without a wife's authority, something between mistress and maid, yet neither. And, worst of all, *here* there was no privacy, not even for long-neglected prayer and self-communion. Not even at church could she feel herself alone, for there she occupied another seat, was made to feel her lowered rank. The bene-

factor's name writ up in letters of gold was no longer hers. Hats that had been lowly doffed at Miss Venables' approach barely left their wearers' sconces; gentry, who had formerly chatted familiarly on their way through the churchyard, passed her by with a bare recognition.

All this and more the big wheel seemed to burr-r-r in her ears, until half wild she would tear away the bunch of loose wool from her waist (for the wool-spinner wrought much as does the rope-maker still from a bunch of hemp or tow at the waist), and rush out into the garden or meadows to rid herself of its monotonous drone and suggestive undertones.

Or she would rush to the stable and, if Hugh was not at hand, saddle her horse herself—she had now no obsequious serving-man at command—and set off at a gallop to shake her rebellious heart into its place, and school herself into the lesson she was learning so late—submission.

"As you make your bed so you must lie," Dame Furnival had said to her before

her marriage was three weeks old ; but she was finding the bed harder every day, and it was not softened by the reflection that it was of her own making.

Only in Hugh's love had she any hope or comfort, and even he seemed another man on the farm and away from it. He was no more his own master than she was mistress there, and they were both made to feel it.

There was evidently some disappointment either in the girl herself or her endowment, and there was a quarrel between the farmer and his son because he refused to hand over more than a third of her cash into his keeping.

Indeed, quarrels were not infrequent, for the father was as hot-tempered and impetuous as his son, and often some shortcoming or fashion of Sybilla's caused the first word. The hours she wasted on horseback, and the extravagance of keeping a horse for neither cart nor plough, were standing grievances.

Hugh was fiery in defence of his be-

loved and beautiful wife; but a wife is never the better loved for needing defence against her husband's kin, and Sybilla began to fear this.

She had another cause for apprehension —a vague something, she could not tell what.

His cousin, the Rev. Thomas Coppock, had long been gone from Spring-Holm, but letters, mysteriously delivered, which came from him to Hugh, were at once destroyed, and were answered as secretly and mysteriously, or she thought so. At such times she would observe the heads of Hugh and his father close together as if in earnest conference, but always out of earshot.

Her father's bitter invectives against Hugh as a 'plotting Jacobite' now recurred to her, and she trembled lest some harm should come to him with all this mystery.

She upbraided Hugh with having secrets she did not share, reminding him of his oft-repeated vows to share every thought

of his heart with her; but he only patted her on the cheek, and answered, laughingly,—

"Ah! I was a lover then, Sybilla, I am a husband now; and, dearest, if it was wise and needful for thee to keep a secret from thy father, may it not be as wise and as needful for me to keep a secret from my wife?"

It was lightly and gaily spoken, and the argument was conclusively sealed with a kiss on her brow, for Hugh was as masterful as her father; but he had roused a thought never to slumber again.

He, who had prompted and urged her to deceive her father, was the first to retaliate, if not taunt her with it. She was told she could expect no more confidence from her husband than she had rendered to her parent; and in anguish and bitterness she asked herself over and over again, "Was it either wise or needful to have secrets from my father?" The unwisdom had become painfully apparent.

Not that Hugh loved her less, but that

others loved her not, and he did not trust her *wholly*.

She began, too, to feel that her father had known more than he had told; and that, if prejudice had blinded him, prepossession had equally blinded her.

Sybilla had been married little more than six months, yet she had begun to repent her disobedience and precipitation, and to long ardently for her old home and the good father she had so unwisely quitted.

Now and then Hugh had met his Aunt Leicester in the Altringham market-place, and had even been passed by Thomas Venables with a set face and darkening brows; but he never brought her back any cheering news or any prospect of pardon, and he refused to take her with him on market-days, lest she should encounter her father and be as sternly met.

For some time she had turned her deft hand to butter-making on the farm, but she had not brought down her pride to stand in the market and offer it for sale, as

did other farmers' wives. And Dame Furnival was as strongly against her "going on an idle jaunt" as was Hugh in his care for her.

At last, unable to bear her own pain, she mounted her horse one fine spring morning when the laburnums were shedding their golden tears, and the lilacs began to fade; and, heeding not the bird-melody of the season, she patted the neck of Chevalier, and was off through the intricate network of green lanes, and along a highway almost as green, to the beloved old home at Timperley, resolved to throw herself at her father's feet and entreat forgiveness.

She had only memory as a guide; memory of the flitting when she rode so unwillingly on by her father's side—memory of a starlit ride by the same route on a pillion behind Hugh to meet the Rev. Thomas Coppock in Prestbury Church, when the vicar warily held aloof, and the clerk who brought the keys and signed the book as witness seemed half afraid.

All that and more came back to her in that long rough ride, at least sixteen or eighteen miles (Hugh, riding across hedges, ditches, brooks, or rivers, had been wont to halve it, spurred by love). She rode on regardless of fatigue, with her brain at high pressure, rehearsing as she went all she would say to soften her father's heart, her own the while beating faster than Chevalier's hoofs.

A new brick wall, a solid oaken gate, had arisen to shut her out of the Oaklands, and no prayer of hers could move a bar. Josh looked out through a tiny trap, muttered "Oi daurna!" and then shut it in her face.

Faint, sick, dizzy, she attempted to turn her horse's head, then, reeling in the saddle, urged him on.

A poor weaver, who had a cottage on the confines of Baguley Moor, to the north of the Oaklands, found her lying on the sward by the wayside half-a-mile from Thomas Venables' gate. A riderless horse

flying past with bridle loose had led him to look for her.

The canvas poke which had held warp and weft for his loom was thrown down in his haste to succour. Many a piece of homespun had filled his loom for Miss Venables ; many a coin had found its way to his pocket from hers ; many a gift to his children ; many a kind word had she said to cheer them. And her luckless love-match had been the talk of the country-side.

CHAPTER V.

FORTUNE'S WHEEL.

WHEN Chevalier found his way back to Spring-Holm without his mistress, all was already in commotion. Sybilla's absence from the mid-day meal had brought down on Hugh the free comments and sharp censure of his mother on the wife he had chosen, and he answered hotly, as usual, the father striking in, regardless of the listening men and maids at the common table.

Already stung by his mother's taunts, the empty saddle drove Hugh Furnival almost frantic. Half mad, he flung him-

self across his own fresh horse, barebacked, to scour the country in search of his wife, all the men on the farm turning out likewise.

Night fell before he found her, lying unconscious and helpless in the weaver's lonely cottage; a bare-legged lad despatched by Barnes to Mrs Leicester—no other than sharp little Billy—having met him by the way, his grimy face all streaked with the course of tears.

It was a sorry sight for Hugh Furnival, when he bent his head to the low doorway of the hut, built at some time by Barnes himself from turf and stones found on the moor. Bare enough was the room, in which the loom by the broad low window was the chief furniture. A roughly-made table, with three legs, and a bench as rough made up the list, if we except a stool or so. The floor was simply of clay, hardened and smoothed by long trampling.

On the bench, where a bundle of weft had been placed for a pillow, lay his fair Sybilla, her flaxen hair all in disorder, a

spot of unnatural red on either cheek, and a strange, incoherent medley of words on her tongue.

The weaver's wife, whose linen mutch was white and clean, though her blue linen over-gown and homespun petticoat were none of the newest, was endeavouring to make her swallow a soothing potion she had concocted from herbs, bunches of which decorated the rafters of the low, thatched roof.

Barnes had found her apparently lifeless, and all his wife's homely skill had been exercised to restore animation.

Hugh's hand was an open one, and both the weaver and his wife had reason to rejoice over their humanity.

"Poor young thing," said they, "it was little enough we could do for her; didn't she save us fro' clemmin', an' help to keep the loom agoin'?"

The sward had been soft, and the mental shock had been worse to Sybilla than that of her fall. Barnes had gone to Altringham himself for an apothecary.

The patient was at once "blooded" by the man of lancets and boluses; and, before night, was pronounced out of immediate danger.

But Sybilla never went back to Spring-Holm.

She was carried with care and caution to Mrs Leicester's for recovery, and then Hugh severed his connection with the farm, and bore his wife off to Manchester. There his Uncle Coppock, the fashionable tailor of Short-Millgate (the chief thoroughfare from the Market Place to the Collegiate Church), opened his doors to receive them, at the instance of his son, the Rev. Thomas Coppock, B.A., who had married them.

Whether any inkling of this disastrous occurrence—almost at his own gate—ever reached the ears of Thomas Venables, was unknown. He had forbidden the utterance of his daughter's name, and he made no sign.

Squire Gerard heard, and his sad eyes grew sadder.

In Manchester a new world seemed to open out to Sybilla Furnival; and her Hugh also seemed to become another man. It was not alone that he cast the slough of his country garb and came out a full-blown beau, with wide coat-skirts and ruffled wrists, snuff-box, periwig and gold-laced hat. He had also cast aside his country manners and conversation, talked more of swords than of scythes, and discussed matters with his uncle's many visitors, which Sybilla feared were fraught with danger.

And much Sybilla wondered at the number and character of those visitors to John Coppock, the Millgate tailor—customers they could scarcely all be, though she knew tailors did occasionally work for women as well as for men.

Sedan chairs set down dignified, long-stomachered dames, with sacques of silken damask or tabinet over enormous hoops, with hoods to cover their powdered heads and screen their faces. Men of fortune and position also came, exchanged a word

or two with John Coppock or his sons, shook hands with Hugh warmly, and went, only to re-appear another day.

Amongst these a certain Dr Byrom was the most prominent, and Sybilla liked him well, for, though only a teacher of a short-hand which he had invented, he was a wit and a poet; his humour was overflowing, and he had always a verse or an epigram at command.

He was a man about fifty-three, with a kindly, intelligent face under his full wig; and he took quite a fatherly interest in the young couple, the secret of which is easily told. He belonged to an old, proud and wealthy family, owning large estates near Manchester; and, marrying his cousin without his father's consent, had been abruptly discarded, and never received into favour.

His wife and daughter were introduced to Mrs Furnival, and after that she was a welcome visitor at the house of the Byroms in Hanging-Ditch (a ditch only perpetuated by name); little Mrs Byrom entering fully

into her anxieties, well remembering the sorrows and struggles of their own early married life. Her sympathy was very cheering to Sybilla, but even she seemed to have a mysterious air of reservation at times.

Now and again a card-party would gather under the roof of the Coppocks, but there was more of conversation than cards, and much of the former was enigmatical to Sybilla. The introduction of a bowl of punch and another of water was the signal for these parties to break up. Every glass was then filled to the brim, the hand that held it was extended over the water-bowl. "To the King!" was said, loyally, and in honour to the toast every glass was emptied to the dregs.

On the first of these occasions to which Sybilla was admitted, she, who knew that none but friends of the exiled Stuarts were there received, expressed her surprise.

"The king?" said she.

"Tush! my child," explained Dr Byrom, "do you not see, we drink the king—over the water. God bless the king!"

"Then you mean the Pretender?" added she, innocently enough.

"Hush! my dear. I mean—" and he nodded significantly,—

> 'God bless the king—I mean our faith's defender;
> God bless—no harm in blessing—the Pretender;
> But who pretender is, and who is king,
> God bless my soul, that's quite another thing.'"

And, with a flourish of his hat, he bowed himself out.

Her father was right. Hugh and his friends certainly were Jacobites, but she had not altogether learned to think with her husband that the Georges were usurpers, or that it was the duty of every right-minded man or woman to strive to bring the banished Stuarts back.

Meanwhile they were living merrily, and she had no suspicion how rapidly her three thousand pounds were melting. Hugh was always sanguine, and spoke of buying a commission in the army, as if that were a certain provision for the future; and she, in her ignorance, believed him.

During this time there was a boy born to them; and the pair, who agreed that he was a perfect marvel of a babe, had a warm dispute concerning his name. Nothing less than that of the exiled young prince would do for Hugh, and Sybilla was as steadfast in adopting that of her own father. It ended in a compromise. When the child was baptised by the Rev. Thomas Coppock, he named it Charles Thomas; but those around noticed, as the child grew, that the father called him Charlie, the mother always *Tom.*

It was apparently a slight difference, but it *was* a difference, and told of a deep-seated yearning for the father and the home she had lost, for which her marriage had not compensated.

The child had seen the light three months when 1745 opened its tearful eyes; and, as the months went round, so did he grow and thrive, and still they lingered at the fashionable tailor's, free with cash and no burden to their host.

Summer had ripened its harvests in the

field when another harvest began to ripen for the field, and first whispers, then rumours, confirmed that Charles Edward, the young Pretender, had landed in Scotland, and that there was a general gathering of the clans around him.

There was a general stir among the Manchester Jacobites, and sure in the Coppock house, where was a constant coming and going.

Hugh Furnival and Thomas Coppock, the one on his own horse, the other on Sybilla's, rode away on secret embassies, and brought back news of the Prince's glorious advance, the proclamation of King James, the success and ovation of his progress. Then that Sir John Cope, sent to oppose him, was defeated near Edinburgh, at Prestonpans; and all was glee and enthusiasm at the Coppocks'. Only Sybilla had forebodings.

The year had travelled on to the closing days of cheerless November. The Prince —who had certainly wasted time in Carlisle —was in Preston, within thirty miles of

Manchester, and the bridges over the Mersey were broken down to arrest his progress south.

On the morning of the 27th, a *single* sergeant, who had without orders marched from Preston during the night, entered Manchester with *one drummer and a woman*, wearing the white cockade, and beating up for recruits—and he got them, if not in the numbers he had counted on.

At nightfall came Prince Charles with the vanguard of his army. A fine brick mansion, standing back from Market-Stead Lane, was requisitioned as his palace. A bellman went round the town—not a very large town then—to give notice of levies to be exacted, and of quarters required for the soldiers of King James, and all the place was in an uproar. The loyal inhabitants shook and trembled, and parted with their coin on compulsion.

The Jacobites, in high feather, illuminated their houses, and pressed forward to do homage. And from the high double steps of the "palace" the Prince harangued the

multitude assembled in the open area in front. There Colonel Townley proudly drew up his Manchester regiment, three hundred strong, to which the Rev. Thomas Coppock had been appointed chaplain, and in which a younger brother, John, and Hugh Furnival had obtained commissions ; though how much of Sybilla's money had gone to the purchase she, poor girl, never knew.

When, on the 1st of December, the Manchester regiment marched, with one division of Highlanders, through Altringham, *en route* for Derby as a stage towards London (having bridged the river with felled poplar trees and planks), Sybilla mounted on Chevalier, with her boy before her, rode alongside the marching regiment, keeping as close to her husband as circumstances would permit, sad enough at heart. She saw the wool-comber looking out over the half-door of his shop, and drew in her breath with a gasp.

The boy clapped his little hands at the music, and just then Sybilla's eyes encoun-

tered those of her father, standing sternly erect by Squire Gerard's side.

A look of mingled sorrow, scorn, and shame crossed his fine face, and then he turned away.

She would have cried out to him, but her tongue seemed tied; another moment, and he was gone.

How keenly the contrast smote her between this ride through Altringham market-place and that other when she was Sybilla Venables! It was overpowering, for she had been reared in allegiance to the reigning dynasty, and had not even the enthusiasm of a righteous cause to uphold her. Her child's prattle scarcely roused her.

The weather broke. The boy became weary, uncomfortable, and restless; she had much ado to keep her cloak around him. Hugh gave his "bonnie Charlie" a caressing word now and then, himself elate; but her heart sank.

There was a halt at Macclesfield for rest and refreshment, the gathering in of stragglers and recruits; but when they reached

Derby on the 4th, Sybilla was utterly worn out, and so was the poor little fellow in her lap.

Wet, hungry, fatigued—they were by no means alone in their discomfort — yet neither shelter nor food was provided. The mayor had flown, and not until an alderman (too lame to decamp) was forcibly made to proclaim "King James," could free quarters be exacted; and then the people were unwilling to receive them. Hugh, coming with the advance, in white laced blue uniform, with scarlet vest, at last secured a large house for the ladies; but the troops pouring in six a-breast, many with disordered dress, and dirty, footsore, and exhausted, were marshalled in the market-place under their drooping standard—St Andrew's red cross on a white field—to await the coming of the Prince; the bagpipes playing to keep their spirits up.

Not until dusk did the Prince arrive—a tall, straight, handsome man, wrapped in a Highland plaid, with a broadsword by his side, and a white bob-wig under his gold-

laced green bonnet—and not until then could the soldiers be billeted or dispersed to find quarters for themselves ; many huddling together in sheds and passages, wherever there was the shelter of a roof, scrambling and almost fighting for food. The Prince himself found quarters at Lord Exeter's house, at the end of Full Street.

Levies and exactions in the name of "King James" were the order of the night and of the morrow, but of these Sybilla was ignorant. She saw little of Hugh or of his cousins, until drum and bagpipe summoned her with the rest to All Saints' Church at six in the evening to hear the young army chaplain preach, as he had preached to them in the Old Church, Manchester. There was rest and repose for her in the service until the fiery eloquence of Thomas Coppock roused and excited her. "He has the fiery zeal of a martyr," she whispered to Hugh, little thinking how many martyrs were gathered under that sacred roof, martyrs to a hopeless cause.

It was a sermon to inspire flagging and

drooping men ; for even on that Thursday night there were doubts and fears in the breasts of many that the projected encampment on Finchley Common would never be reached. The people did not rise as expected. French and Welsh levies did not appear ; and on the morrow dissatisfaction reached a climax ; even sanguine Hugh advocating retreat before King George's forces rendered it impossible.

After a solemn council of war, "retreat" was the word. And if advance meant discomfort, what must *retreat* have meant.

Manchester was entered in very different array and spirits on Monday the 9th. There was no cordial reception from even a section of the community. The wise and merciful policy of the chief merchants alone prevented hostilities and loss of life ; they were harassed and pelted by the mob as they went ; and had not Sybilla been a good horsewoman she would never have kept her seat and guarded her boy, her steed, though jaded was so harried.

Such a revolution had set in that even

John Coppock, the tailor, was almost afraid to receive his sons and the Furnivals under his roof, and refused point-blank to take charge of Sybilla and her child, whom Hugh was not only anxious to leave in safety, but had begun to feel burdensome.

Something of this she had seen in Derby, when the difficulty to obtain quarters for the officers' wives had disconcerted him; their after discomfort, no less than his own, and the fretful restlessness of his boy stung him to irritability, and he blamed her angrily for her inability to "keep Charlie quiet."

During the hurried retreat she had seen little of her husband, and when she did there was little comfort to be given. Foot-sore and weary with the hasty march, he was scarcely disposed for sympathy with the fatigue of one on horseback, and the sorrow he expressed for bringing wife and child into such straits was as much for himself as for them.

Loth as Sybilla was to separate from her husband, all the mother spoke within her

when John Coppock, having refused more than temporary shelter, she went with her boy in her arms through the rabble in the streets, to seek a home with the Byroms, whilst Hugh went on with the troops.

Compassionate enough was Mrs Byrom, but her answer was, "*I dare not!* Byrom will have to flee and hide himself. If I were known to harbour and shelter the wife and child of what they call 'a rebel' in arms, I should bring destruction on ourselves. *I dare not*, my dear, for the sake of my own daughter and our home, much as I feel for you both."

"Then there is nothing for us but to go forward," said Sybilla despondingly, "and hope for the best. But I fear we shall be a sorry drag on Hugh, and how poor little Tom will bear the cold and wet, I know not!"

What would the young wife have given now for a father's heart and home to flee to for comfort and shelter? The recollection of the abundant stores and warm fireside she had wilfully foregone seemed

to mock her misery. How often did Dame Furnival's harsh proverb recur to her.

She was finding the bed she had made for herself wofully hard.

Pass we briefly over the hurried, anxious, miserable retreat from Manchester to Carlisle in the bitterest mid-winter, through towns and villages where the populace were either openly hostile, or afraid to show favour or compassion—for it had come to that.

Sybilla was no modern fine lady. She had been accustomed to brave the weather, but not privation, and both had to be met; and, though a good horsewoman, had not been trained to keep in a saddle day after day, with barely an intermission; nor yet to carry a child fifteen months old on her lap, huddled up in her cloak.

There was a halt and a day's rest on the 12th at Preston, whilst compulsory levies were made on the inhabitants, or she would have given in utterly.

She was too proud to complain, whilst not only her dear Hugh, but women and

children marched on foot with shoes so worn that people on the route were robbed of theirs to supply the need. And what became of the weariness of riding, when first one and then another dropped out of the line of march to perish of cold, hunger, and fatigue by the wayside; and strong men fought and contended for the horses of others.

No one was heard to envy the Prince the black horse he bestrode; but many a covetous glance and word was flung on Sybilla and her black horse, with its one white stocking hidden in mud.

Once or twice she voluntarily dismounted to give a more weary mother a lift, and she offered the like to Hugh and the Rev. Thomas Coppock; but the lieutenant said he must march with his men, and the chaplain that it was not for the soldier of Christ to seek his own ease.

But the retreat had become a flight. Not only was the small army of Highlanders and English harassed by Georgian Rangers as they fled, but the ruthless Duke of Cum-

berland was following fast with an overwhelming force.

There came a rumour from the south that the Pretender's French allies had landed on the coast. It was a new aspect of affairs, and the Duke stopped abruptly for assurance.

It was only a brief respite, but a massacre was doubtless saved; and the followers of Charles Edward, utterly worn out in crossing the Westmoreland Fells, had thereby a chance to bivouac at Shap. Few were the cottages, and there was no place in them for Sybilla.

The ruined walls of an old abbey were their only shelter from the bleak and cutting north winds. Yet there, by such a fire as soldiers make where wood is plentiful, she accepted thankfully the coarse morsel of food obtainable, fed her ravenous boy, and, with him in her arms, slept on a wisp of straw, with the sky for a canopy. Fatigue was stronger than fear or caution, and Hugh slept likewise.

There is a blast from the bagpipes. Up,

sleepers, up! The Duke is again on the march; there is no time for slumber or delay. Delicate women or hardy men must alike be on the move. And now it is a panic!

But where is Chevalier? Stolen whilst his owners slept!

There was no seeking the horse in the skurry. The wife of the lieutenant and of the private were on a level now; she must foot it with the rest, and be thankful she had good shoes to her feet for the tramp before her.

Ten miles of the rudest road, and Egmont Bridge was crossed and Penrith gained. But there was no pause. Terror gave her strength to carry her boy, who whimpered now and then, but never cried aloud. Cold and hunger and fatigue had overmatched the little one's strength and spirit.

Eighteen more miles before them ere they could reach the stronghold they sought, whilst the roar of artillery and the rattle of musketry in their rear were telling

how the brave Macphersons were laying down their lives to give them a chance to make good their retreat.

And now across the cultivated plain the battlemented towers of Carlisle cathedral and castle loomed in the distance, on the high hill-tops, through the morning mist, and hope awoke again, though every mile seemed three to weary, blistered feet.

And now the English gate is open, and over the bridges and up the hill stream the motley and ragged regiments, and Sybilla whispers to her boy,—

"Now, Tom, we are safe. We can rest at last."—Safety and rest! Ah, me!

Carlisle was about as well prepared for this second visitation of Charles Edward's army as any other garrison town with a roomy castle in its midst could be; yet, for all that, the inhabitants had to turn out of their beds to supply the more urgent needs of the newcomers.

Sybilla did not trouble herself whence it came when she lay down on one of the requisitioned beds in the castle itself, with

little Tom in her arms. She could only think that the strong walls of the city and of the castle lay between them and their foes.

She resigned herself to repose with a delicious sense of security, and slept long. With some ado Hugh obtained from the baggage a change of raiment for his wife and boy ; and, after a sadly-needed wash, she felt refreshed and cheerful.

The child, too, laughed, and in its formless speech expressed its satisfaction.

Yet, even then, a council of war was being held on which hung the balance of fate.

Lord George Murray—he who had driven back the English advance at Clifton in the darkness of the night to cover the retreat—he counselled the abandonment of Carlisle and the destruction of the castle, but other counsels prevailed ; and Colonel Townley, with many an oath, in his excess of loyalty vowed that he and his Manchester regiment would hold Carlisle for King James, until Prince Charles should return

with reinforcements to relieve him of his trust.

There was a sharp debate, but the voluntary sacrifice was accepted. And a sacrifice it was—or blind infatuation.

Deeply touched with this devotion, Charles Edward at once appointed Colonel Townley, Governor, and nominated the chaplain, Thomas Coppock, Bishop of Carlisle.

Then, after an address to the assembled garrison, the Prince, who had led his army in at the English gate on the 19th, left Carlisle by the Scotch gate on the 21st, and his army with him—not all, some few Highlanders and Lowlanders and French were left to strengthen Colonel Townley's forlorn hope. A forlorn hope indeed! The Manchester regiment had shrunk and dwindled before Lancashire was traversed, and the whole garrison left to hold the city against veteran troops did not far exceed three hundred men. Three hundred men! So many were the Spartans at Thermopylæ!

CHAPTER VI.

THE PHANTOM SPINNER.

THE new Governor depended on the strength of the city walls and the Duke of Cumberland's want of artillery. Alas! the walls were old and decaying, and the vigorous Duke obtained artillery from Whitehaven.

Until then Lieutenant Furnival had shared the sanguine faith of his more experienced colonel, and had represented to Sybilla that city and castle were all but impregnable; and she, only too thankful to rest her exhausted limbs day after day, was well content to watch the gambols of

her boy, and kiss his father for the glad assurance. Nay, she laughingly held up Tom's little feet and one of her own, and asked if it was not time they had new shoes.

In reply, Hugh drew forth his pocket-book, and handed to her a bank-note, with the admonition to be careful.

She looked up in his face with surprise. When had Hugh been "careful," or suggested care to her! But as he closed his pocket-book, she remarked its diminished bulk, and wondered how much remained therein.

And then as he turned to go, she looked at the note in her hand. It was for twenty pounds, the lowest issued at that period.

Stifling a sigh, she dressed herself and boy, and, taking the little toddler by the hand, went forth from the castle in search of a cordwainer.

Her own wants were the sorest, and soonest supplied, but then came a difficulty about the bank-note, on which the man of leather and lapstone fixed a rueful stare.

"Have you no change?" asked Sybilla.

"Ou, ay; bud mappen bank's brokken!"

Rumours of the run on the Bank of England must have reached Cumberland, and the shoemaker stroked his bristly chin and scratched his red head long before he produced his bag of guineas and counted out her change, minus half-a-guinea for the risk he ran.

The half-guinea seemed less to Sybilla *then* than the supply of her immediate needs, and she went on, carrying her boy, to make one or two other purchases for Hugh's comfort as well as theirs, in which two or three of the guineas melted.

Wool and knitting-pins were amongst the things she bought, and then she sat down in tolerable content to knit warm hose for her husband and child.

The calm was but the prelude to the storm.

On the 27th, the dreaded Duke began to batter down the crumbling walls in answer to Colonel Townley's refusal to surrender.

On the 31st, the hopeless garrison *had surrendered.* The only terms granted

being that the rebels should be reserved for the king's pleasure — not put to the sword.

At the sound of the first gun, Sybilla's heart had sunk within her. She had snatched up Tom, and would have flown in quest of Hugh, but—"orders were peremptory that the ladies must keep to their quarters." There, shut in out of sight, but not of hearing, they crowded together, adding to each other's terror. Only the new bishop came to their relief, and told the progress of the siege, and strove to cheer them with his own bright faith.

When Hugh came, with white and weary face, all was over.

"My love," said he, with a sob, as he held her and Tom clasped in a close embrace, "they will not, cannot harm you, but they will separate us, and—oh, I was surely mad to plunge you into this misery!—there is no time to lose, you must quit the castle, and seek shelter in the town."

"I will *not* leave you," she said, with mournful resolution, clinging to him in

agony. "I am punished for leaving my father, but I will not quit you in your extremity."

She had no choice. The castle was ransacked. The frightened women, robbed of their valuables, were driven by the brutal soldiery into the castle-yard, to behold their nearest and dearest stripped of watches, rings, money, uniforms, shoes, and pinioned together like malefactors, driven half-clad through the streets in coarse derision to the cathedral on the opposite hill, with the new Bishop of Carlisle at their head to "lead his flock."

Blows and hideous jests were not spared, and Sybilla thought her brain would have turned, as Tom, stretching out his little arms, shrieked "dada" to his father, who was struck with the butt-end of a firelock for turning his head to reply.

A poor widow, finding her fainting on a doorstep, with the child crying in alarm, took compassion on them and gave them shelter.

There was no communicating with the

prisoners huddled together, half-naked, in the cold cathedral. Sybilla could only wait, and wait, and strive to still her throbbing pulses by some active work.

It so happened that Widow Fell got her living by spinning wool. Sybilla set down her boy on the floor, took her place at the wheel, and stepping to and fro, on and off the treadle, kept it in motion, and from the tuft of wool at her waist spun so fine a yarn that the widow could only look on in wonder.

Ten busy days and restless nights, and then there was a stir throughout the city. The cathedral doors were thrown open, and the prisoners brought forth.

The Rev. Thomas Coppock and several of the Highlanders were marched across the town to the castle, there to abide the rebels' doom.

But Sybilla, with the hood of her cloak drawn over her gipsy hat, and her boy in her trembling arms, watched only, with gasping breath, for Hugh—her Hugh.

And she saw him, but with the rest of

the officers on horseback, with legs tied together underneath the girth, and arms so pinioned that he could barely hold the reins. As for the poor privates, they were strung together with ropes, and driven forth on shoeless feet.

Sybilla pressed forward to exchange a parting word with Hugh, but was roughly driven back ; and she could only shriek his name, as the mounted dragoons, with flashing swords, kept back the crowd, and led their ill-clad prisoners away through the English gate, the head of one horse tied to the tail of the former.

There was no rest for Sybilla now, she must follow—but whither ?

The compassionate widow, well known in the town, ascertained that Colonel Townley and one or two others were bound to London.

" London ! And no horse, and little money, and my boy to carry. Oh ! what shall I do ?" and she wrung her hands in helpless impotence.

The thoughtful widow came to her aid.

"T' rooads are dangerous for leddies. You must goo as a puir boddie. Strap t' lad on yer back, and tak a basket wi' summut t' eat o' t' rooad, an' knit as yo goo alang. T' fwoak at farms 'll gie yo bite an' sup; an' yo can pay weel for lodgin' wi' a spell at th' spinnin'-wheel."

She would take no coin in payment for her service or the shelter she had afforded. She said she had had a lesson in spinning which would repay her all her life through.

"Ah, my friend," said Sybilla, "your wheel has been my safeguard. But for that I think I should have gone mad."

The woman took the proffered guinea, but only to get it changed and buy a basket and so forth.

Then, professing to have herself an errand out of the town, she took up a huge bundle of yarn, as if for a weaver, and bearing Sybilla company, managed to get her out through the guarded city gate.

"Mappen turf-cutters here and there 'll gie t' lad a ride in t' panniers; or yo may get a lift i' t' stage waggon. But dinna

show t' colour on your money an' yo can help."

And so, with tears and thanks, they parted, Sybilla with a load on her back and in her breast, and the length of England to traverse *on foot.*

Of the dangers of the road she had heard, but hardly knew. She soon found that her occupation and her poverty were her security. Though more than once when her pockets were searched, and found almost empty, she had trembled for their lives, yet was she allowed to pass unharmed. And though she rarely got a better bed than a litter of straw or a nook in a hayloft, she seldom found hospitality denied. Her offer to pay for accommodation by the work of her hands won her respect even where it was rejected. Here and there she was allowed to rest more than a night; her manners, her sorrowful beauty, her early motherhood, winning favour with some, though from others they brought down only scorn and revilings. Occasionally she got a lift for her boy, or

both of them, on a packhorse, or in a cart or a stage-waggon; for the last by payment.

But she learned to be sparing of her coin. In the country it was seldom needed; the bowl of milk, the hunch of bread, the scrap of cake were freely given.

In towns it was otherwise. There she had to pay, or be treated with contumely as a strolling vagabond. Yet was she afraid to touch her hidden store, the first tradesman to whom she had offered a guinea having roundly accused her of theft, so little did her appearance justify its possession. Her tears and what she told of her pitiful story to save herself from the watch-house disarmed the baker, who changed her coin, and bade her show no more of the colour if she valued her freedom or her life, for the roads swarmed with footpads.

That was at Lancaster, under the very shadow of John O'Gaunt's castle, where the man, himself a Jacobite, told her in a whisper several of the rebels were then imprisoned.

There, too, she obtained certain information that Hugh and his colonel had been carried farther south; and the man, as respectful as he had been harsh, recommended her to a decent lodging for the night, and freed her a stage in the waggon next day.

After that, she depended more on the mittens and hose she knitted. At first she had found Tom such a load on her back that she could scarcely use her knitting-pins, but necessity and a little time made it easier. Then she set him down to stretch his limbs and run by her side betimes.

And so she went forward after her unfortunate husband—in what hope or fear she hardly knew herself—wounded to the core by the brutal jests on the rebels and their probable fate which everywhere fell on her ears, and enduring hardships, indignities, and anguish, of which she could only thank God her little son could know nothing. He could feel hunger and inclement weather, but, to the best of her poor ability, she guarded him from them.

She reached London at last. But she found the walls of Newgate harder, colder, and more pitiless than the weather. Grim, grey, and unresponsive they rose between her and Hugh.

Yet scarcely harder, colder, or more pitiless than the strange city in which she stood homeless in the month of March, with few coins about her, a name she dared not own, a helpless child to keep, and no means of support but her knitting-pins. What wonder if visions of the far-off Oaklands, its glowing fires, cushioned chairs, rich clothing, appetising viands, floated before her, and smote her with self-reproach, as she staggered away from the prison gate, refused admission, and not knowing whither to turn for hope or shelter!

Was this all for which she had forsaken father and home?

. . . . . .

The fields of Cheshire were ripened unto harvest, kine were lowing in the pastures, sickles were sharpened for the rustling corn, the flaunting poppies nodded

carelessly, orchards bent beneath their load of fruit, in the dairies churns and cheese-presses were full and at work.

Another harvest was being gathered in.

In the great kitchen of the Oaklands, where the rows of pewter platters and dishes shone like silver against the white-washed wall, and the wooden bowls and trenchers were ranged, as fresh and clean and tempting, Ursula—fat, fussy, and self-important, as she thought it behoved her to be—watched a preserving-kettle hanging from a crane over the hot fire on the open hearth in the huge chimney, alternately wiped the moisture from her forehead and scolded the younger maids, who were stripping currants and shelling broad beans, and whispering low their wonder, "What would become of poor Mrs Furnival?"

Out in the grounds the master of the Oaklands stalked moodily to and fro; now slowly, as if lost in thought; now hurriedly, and with a sort of fierce light in his eye, and a grip of his closed hand, as if an

enemy was crushed within it. At such times he held his head erect as of yore, but his shoulders had contracted a perceptible stoop, and his hair was no longer black, but iron-grey.

There was a sound of hoofs in the lane, a pull at the great bell of the closed gate; Josh hobbled round the corner of the house to open it, and Mr Venables, who had crossed the bridge he had built for Sybilla's convenience, turned back and stood with one hand upon the parapet to await his visitor.

"Well, what news?" said he, as Squire Gerard came towards him, with a curious expression on his long, melancholy visage.

"News? Terrible news, I call it. The rebels in London have been tried, and their leaders executed—barbarously."

"They were traitors, and deserved their punishment," said Mr Venables sternly.

"Ay, punishment if you will, but not torture! The horrid sight killed Jemmy Dawson's sweetheart, poor lass! I saw the heads of Townley and Deacon spiked

atop of the Manchester Exchange yesterday."

"And what of—"

Gerard filled up the pause,—

"Furnival?—he is one of those reserved for transportation."

"The traitor! they should have hanged him too!" and Thomas Venables set his teeth on the words.

"The blow will fall heavily enough on *her* as it is," said his gentler companion sadly; then adding, as he drew a soiled letter from his pocket, "I found this lying at the 'Unicorn' as I came through Altringham this morning. It is from London, from—"

"Then let it fall! she cast in her lot with traitors, and deserves no pity!"

As the words burst from the inflexible old man, his glance fell on the superscription of the letter. For a moment his hand shook, and his face paled.

Then the unread missive was torn hastily up into shreds, and cast forth over the water.

The breeze blew pieces of the paper back. One fell at Gerard's feet, another on the stone parapet of the bridge, close to his hand. A word or two caught his eye.

He started, picked up the scrap at his feet, regardless of ceremony.

"Snow Hill, Lond—" was upon it.

"If your love has turned to gall, mine has not,' he said, in bitter reproach; 'Sybilla stands in sore need of a friend, and she shall at least have one. I shall start for London ere daybreak to-morrow —Josh, my horse."

His horse was brought back. His foot was in the stirrup.

"Have you no word for her?"

There was no answer. Gerard galloped off, with a face as set and determined as the one he had left behind, but it was set to a kinder purpose.

. . . . . .

The harvests of rebellion had been reaped on the field and on the gallows.

The harvests of Cheshire had been garnered; geese feasted amid the stubble;

the aftermath was mown and stacked; the potatoes dug on Bowdon Downs; the hazel nuts in Wood Lane tempted the village boys; beech and oak were dropping mast and acorns within the precincts of the Oaklands; leaves—yellow, red, brown—hung limp upon the trees, or, crisp and sear, littered the pathways, and driving before the wind, tapped at the windows of the house, whose master, sitting alone by his fireside, had a something tapping at his breast, just as the leaves tapped on the panes—and conscience was the driving wind.

Walking moodily through his own meadow that afternoon, he had looked over the hedge, where it skirted Wood Lane, to rebuke some children who were roughly tearing down the brambles to gather the ripe blackberries. He knew them for the younger children of Barnes, the weaver; but in their midst stood a white-headed ragged urchin some two years old, who looked up at him with large blue eyes, and a mouth all stained with the fruit.

That face was haunting him as he sat by the fire at eventide, with his book of philosophy unread—sat until the moon rose, and the bats came out and flapped against the casement louder than the leaves.

Why did it haunt him so?

"Such a child might have been Sybilla's had she borne one!—and they called it *Tom*," whispered conscience.

"Gerard has not returned. I have neither friend nor child by my hearth. Might I not have had child and grandchild both, had I been more forgiving?"

And so conscience tapped, as there he sat, the shadows deepening around him, the curtain undrawn, no candles lit.

In the bright kitchen, Ursula sat in state in her blue camlet gown and farthingale, directing the maids, who were busy sorting damsons for wine, picking stray leaves from elderberries, and preparing the evening meal. Josh, with a dog at his feet, and a red handkerchief over his head, sat dozing by the fire. Candles in tall mahogany silver-mounted candle-

sticks stood unlighted on a waiter, with snuffers and tray by their side.

"Strange, master has not rung for his candles," said one.

"Hush!" exclaimed another, in a frightened whisper. "There it is again! Don't you hear it?"

Hear it! the dog heard it, and Josh heard it and wakened up; and Ursula heard it, and clasping her hands, uttered a pious ejaculation in her fear.

"God save us all! there it is again: Miss Sybilla's wheel going hard and fast, and her door locked, and her far away."

"Ay, it be Miss Sybilla's wheel, sure enoof," put in Josh. "What be oop?"

"An' this be th' third toime we'n heared it," cried a girl.

"Summat's happened to th' young misses, an' yon's her ghoast!" said Josh, in an oracular whisper.

The musical hum of the wheel was certainly clear and distinct as a song. Silence fell on the white-faced listeners.

"I wonder if master hears it?" asked one, below her breath.

"Master, he seems to hear nowt, now-a-days," muttered the old man.

A bell rang.

"There's master ringing for his candles," cried Ursula.

But no one stirred. And still was heard the monotonous hum-m-m-m.

Again rang the library bell. In fear three maids together threaded the passages with the lighted candles. Nothing was to be heard at the library door, and no one dared speak of Sybilla's spinning-wheel to their master.

The servants were afraid to go about the house alone, or to pass the door of the deserted room, on their way to bed, for the drone of the wheel did not cease. And it drove sleep from their pillows.

Mr Venables used the other stairs, and heard nothing more than what he took for the sighing of the wind.

Night by night the sound was heard; only on the Sabbaths was it silent.

Rumour went abroad that the house was haunted. The timid maids at length refused to pass the doors of Sybilla's rooms on their way to bed, and Ursula was no more courageous. They preferred sleeping as best they could on tables and settles in the kitchen; Ursula took possession of a guest-chamber near her master's; Josh resumed his abandoned quarters above the stables.

Only Mr Venables, occupied with his own thoughts, walked about in unalarmed ignorance; yet even he was conscious of a mysterious something in the air of his household and of the village; and he began to speculate why Gerard did not return.

Now and again he encountered the same little fellow in the lanes with others, poorly clad, but no longer in rags; and once or twice he stooped and stroked the child's white head, and gave him a silver groat. But he only went back to his solitary hearth more moody and silent.

And still from twilight until dawn the

wheel was heard to hum-m-m ; and whispers went abroad of a mysterious figure like Miss Sybilla (always Miss Sybilla) seen in the dim light to flit under the dark shadows of yews and evergreens and over the bridge, and to carry a bundle with her, as she must have done when she fled.

There was only one opinion, that she was dead, and her unquiet spirit could not rest—unforgiven.

With the coming of December came back Squire Gerard.

In every line of his melancholy face was seen disappointment.

He sat down in his old place, opposite to Mr Venables, wearily.

He thought he saw a look of expectation in the old man's face, and he noted that his hair had become white as snow.

"I have no tidings. No one bearing the name of either Furnival or Venables had been heard of in Snow Hill. I tried Southwark, whither the prisoners had been removed, thinking she might have followed her unfortunate husband ; but

though I heard of a poor, torn-down wretch, who had shrieked out 'Hugh' as the prisoners were driven on board the transport, I could find no trace of her, high or low; and I fear we never shall. God help her!"

With his head bent low, his hands clasped between his knees, Mr Venables had listened in silence. But Gerard saw his shoulders heave, and his whole frame convulse with strong emotion.

Gerard made no stay. As Josh went with him to open and secure the outer gate, he told in awe-stricken tones how the house was haunted, and the servants afraid to stay.

"Master heerd the wheel himsel' last week; but he swore some on us weer playin' him a trick, and only last night as was, he nailed up th' door as shuts off them rooms, and with his own hands, while th' varry wheel wer buzzing its loudest. He said he'd silence the spinner; no tricks should be played in his house. But lor,' Squire, th' wheel went on just th' same."

Gerard rode away thoughtfully. He was not without a tinge of the superstition of the time ; and what he had heard but confirmed his fears that his dearly-loved Sybilla was no more.

The morning, crisp and keen, saw him once more at the Oaklands.

He found the owner in the grounds giving orders for the filling up of a gap in the hedge that separated the meadow from Wood Lane, and looking haggard, though composed.

They strolled together by the water side, talking of various matters ; but no sooner were they out of earshot than Gerard adverted to the rumour he had heard.

"A dastardly trick, sir," cried the old gentleman, through the ashen pallor of his lips. "It was a sorry time and a sorry jest to play on a childless man. But I've silenced the wheel ; there was no spinning last night."

"But, sir—"

What further Gerard would have said was cut short.

A little blue-eyed child, coming through the gap in the hedge, ran across the meadow to meet them, followed at a distance by Barnes the weaver.

"What oo done wi' my mammy, grandad? Mammy, 'at tum' to 'pin? What oo done wi' mammy?' almost shrieked the little fellow between his sobs.

Gerard gazed at the child, and then at Mr Venables, who seemed struck dumb as a statue.

"I want my mammy!" began the child again.

"Mrs Furnival, mester," explained Barnes apologetically as he came up, 'she cam' oop here to spin i' th' noight-toime t' keep her sen an' th' little chap; an we hanna seen her sin—"

A hoarse cry burst from the old man. Flinging his arms wildly in the air, he rushed over the bridge, and through the court-yard, towards the house. But Gerard was before him, armed with a gardener's pick he had caught up by the way.

At the very back of the splintered door

they found Sybilla prostrate with hunger, cold, exhaustion, and despair.

For the first time Gerard's arms enfolded her, and he bore her swiftly to the warmth and life below, insensible, but living.

Kisses from little lips did almost as much as Ursula's cordials to restore her.

She opened her eyes to see Tom on her father's knee; to feel her hand within that father's clasp; to hear his fervent "Thank God! she revives! I have not killed my darling!" And, as in a dream, a soothing sense of home, forgiveness, peace stole into her soul, though her eyelids drooped again.

Later, she had a hazy consciousness of Gerard watching her with shaded eyes from behind her father's chair, and of Ursula and others hovering near.

And she heard, still dreamily, the voice of Barnes as he related how he had found her one stormy afternoon in October, sitting half-dead with cold, want, and fatigue, on Baguley Moor, huddled up to keep the lad on her lap from the rain. He took her for

a beggar; but he could not leave her to perish. He chanced to have in his poke some cake and elderberry wine, given him at the Hall, where he had been with a web of homespun. They helped the poor creatures round, so that when he took the lad she could just drag herself to his cottage, where his missus set up a shout, and called him a "thick-yed" for not knowing who he'd brought home. It was a poor shelter for such as she; but 'twas better than none. And whatever they had done for her, they had been paid both beforehand and since, through Billy and her spinning.

That neither Thomas Venables nor Squire Gerard thought so, the humane weaver and his family had ample proof in the aftertime.

From Sybilla herself they learned how she had slipped in from the court-yard before the doors were barred for the night, and how, on finding her sitting-room door locked, she passed through the open landing door, found her bedroom door beyond

*un*locked, and so had the range of both. She had made use of her old wardrobe as well as of the wheel, thus adding unconsciously to the delusion of the ghost. She had resorted to her wheel as a means of support, and to relieve her preservers of an extra burden. She had occupied by day a bed they used by night; and their humble cot had been a peaceful haven. Nothing could repay *them.*

There were sighs and self-reproaches on both sides. Mrs Leicester and the Furnivals came in for their share of blame; but though Sybilla expressed contrition for her wilfulness and disobedience, and confessed that she had soon found her ill-advised marriage a mistake, she avoided reference to Hugh. Her wifely love and sorrow were sacred.

She was at home, at rest. The love of her boy and his grandfather was hers; the friendship of Gerard—of whose fruitless quest she had heard; but there was still the canker of grief at her heart, and neither love nor friendship could overcome the

effects of anguish and privation in her wanderings.

They laid her to rest in the spring, and Sybilla's Spinning Wheel was silent for evermore.

In eighteen months Thomas Venables lay by his daughter's side, and little Tom was left as a sacred trust to the squire. At least so he regarded his executorship ; and, when he died in fulness of years, " Gerard of Riddings, last of his name and race," was inscribed on his tomb. He had never married.

BY WAYS UNKNOWN.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE BRIDGE.

OF all sleepy country towns, surely Sandwich, on the Kentish coast, is the very drowsiest. Let us admit it is, at the same time, one of the cleanest.

On the hottest summer day the quaint irregular buildings spread cool shadows over the narrow streets, where Progress fell asleep more than two centuries agone, and never prince or peer with magic kiss has wakened her again. The very wasps

and flies seem to have forsaken the spot; the few that linger float about as if imbued with the universal somnolence, not daring to disturb the repose of the people by buzzing and humming too busily.

Few are the carts or carriages rumbling through the streets to break their silence save on the market days; no seamstress sits by the open window to look out; no eager young faces peer over blinds; there is nothing new to be seen, nothing to be expected. Besides, respectability forbids vulgar curiosity; and the whole place is eminently respectable, as a small town, ruled by a mayor and corporation, and the clergy of three churches, and boasting two foundation hospitals and a grammar school, must be as a matter of course, even though the venerable grammar school be neglected in its dotage, a building only, without a master and without scholars. You may see grass in the thoroughfares, but no beggars and no rags.

When the womenkind do their shopping, or their visiting, is a puzzle for the

speculative. They do not meet or jostle on the narrow footpaths; do not flutter their finery before admiring throngs;—there is no one to admire.

Of late years, a railway, passing the town at a respectful distance on the western border, has brought a something of vitality, under cover of modern brick and stucco, to the suburb; and now and then a train may land there an adventurous visitor from bustling Deal, or an inquisitive antiquary, fresh from Richborough, may stray thither to pore into the recesses of its ancient churches, examine its gateways, and other relics of the past, in order to establish some historic fact, or knock down some opponent's theory. Or, maybe, an artist, with a love for the antique, lounging lazily through his holiday, strolls past the new villa residences with scarcely a lifted eyelid, and coming fresh upon the quaint old place, falls straightway in love with its "cool tones," the picturesque buildings thronging its winding ways, with here an arch of ancient

masonry, there an overhanging window in a high-pitched gable, or a front of overlapping plank, relics of the past both in churches and quiet nooks, and so, being dreamily inclined, may be beguiled into a brief sojourn there until Sandwich, as he sees it, finds its way into his porfolio in sketches of still life.

For, of the active life of Sandwich in its palmy days, before the sand silted up and the sea retired, when it was chief of the Cinque Ports, and furnished its quota of war-ships to the king in his need, the only memory lies outside the ancient Fisher-Gate, and the Barbican, amongst the line of old warehouses and wharves on the water side, where still a few schooners, and other vessels of broad build and light draught load and unload, or across the river Stour and the long swing bridge, where a clink of hammers in a shipbuilder's yard (backed by rapidly disappearing green woods), mayhap gives token that the black hull of some damaged schooner or lugger is undergoing repair.

Such was the case a few years before the railway hove in sight, when just such a stroller, dressed in a loose blouse, and with one of the newly-introduced soft felt hats upon his head, turned his back alike upon the smooth dusty road trending towards Ramsgate, and on the verdure of sward or shrubbery on either hand, and, propped against the trunk of a tall elm near the bridge (one of a line, skirting the road), sketched bridge and Barbican gateway and surroundings, at his leisure, under shadow of the foliage.

A vessel, newly-laden either at the great Kent Brewery, or some other storage to his right, was working its way down the sandy Stour with the outgoing tide ; and an old seafaring man or bridge-keeper, pipe in mouth, leaned with both arms on the parapet of the bridge, watching its approach.

" Now, if there was only a pretty girl or an old woman to occupy the foreground, the picture would be complete. The old salt is all very well for the middle distance,"

said the artist to himself, as he put a fresh dab of colour on his sketch, "but—"

As if conjured up by the wish, a young girl, between fifteen and sixteen, wearing a straw bonnet with an open brim, a clean but well-washed printed frock, which fell to her instep in full soft folds, and a small shawl-handkerchief, laid lightly over her shoulders, came along the sandy footpath, under the shadow of the high hedge and the wooden palisade of the shipyard, to make her way over the bridge.

"Hillo! here she is, by Jove!" almost burst from the lips of the sketcher, as, unobservant of him or his occupation, she pursued her way, bearing an open basket on her arm and a parcel in her hands.

"Now, if she would but stop and turn her face. Egad, Pierce! you are in luck's way this morning. And, good heavens! what a face, and what eyes under that poor straw bonnet! What lucky chance swung the bridge open for that overgrown barge to pass, just as she came up.

Pierce, my boy, you must make the most of your moments."

"Oh, dear, what a pity I was not across before the bridge was opened. I shall be kept *such* a while!" was the inaudible ejaculation of the young girl, as the centre of the bridge, answering some mechanical leverage under command of its keeper, swung back to let the approaching vessel glide slowly through the gap. "I may as well put my basket and parcel down, a hot day like this," she further communed with herself, as she deposited the flat open basket at her feet, and laid the good-sized paper parcel lightly on the top; "it's best to wait patiently. Mother would call this stoppage ill luck, seeing the hurry I'm in. But what's the use, as Mrs Rye says, of making every small hindrance into a real misfortune with grumbling. I catch myself at it more than is good for me. As for poor mother, one needn't wonder if her great misfortune does make her fret at small ones. She never seems to get it out of her mind. I wonder if ever—"

and here, as she rested against the stone parapet of the bridge, with her lightly-clasped hands hanging low before her, thought wandered off in a haze of speculation; her head uplifted, her large dark eyes expanded dreamily, and she looked across the bridge roadway and up the river, seeing neither shipping nor warehouses, nor trees, nor people, save those of her own wonderland, and was only roused at last by the noise the bridge-centre made in its readjustment.

Meanwhile, crossing the open country by the grass-grown Monk's Walk, a military officer in undress had come upon the scene. He was not apparently more than three-and-twenty, slender for his height if not for his years, with a face full of fire and enthusiasm, of prompt decision and steadfast purpose. He was clean shaven, but there was a close crop of ruddy chesnut curls under his military cap, and they had sent their advanced lines down his fair cheeks, as a protest against effeminacy.

Coming unheard over the thick grass, he

saluted the busy sketcher lightly, "So, my knight of the brush, still at work? How long do—" and Captain Ainslie paused.

In stooping to take a sidelong glance at the sketch, his gaze was attracted—not to the picture of Sandwich harbour, but to a face apart in a corner of the paper.

"What wondrous eyes!" he ejaculated, "Why Hathersage, my boy, that face will make your fortune!"

"I've no objection. But hush, Captain, or the owner may hear you," and Pierce Hathersage looked up across the road once more at his unconscious model.

She had heard only the clash of the re-settling bridge. Involuntary was her start, and slight, as was the sudden movement of her head; but it brought the tree within range, and those beneath it.

In an instant she had picked up the parcel and basket at her feet, and hurried away over the bridge, and under the archway of the Barbican Gate, with the crimson flag of insulted modesty fluttering in her face.

The momentary glimpse had revealed two pairs of masculine eyes fixed upon her; and she needed no telling what the sketch-book meant.

"Ah! modest as well as pretty, and modesty eclipses beauty," exclaimed the officer, as he watched her disappear under the archway. "As rare a sample of a Kentish maid as I have met. Poor, by her garb. Alas! for her, beauty and poverty together form a dangerous heritage for a girl. The interesting damsel bids fair to play havoc with the hearts of despairing swains when she grows to womanhood. But rough labour and hard usage are destructive to female charms, and at the best she can but fall to the lot of some clodhopper, tinker or tailor, incapable of appreciating the prize he wins." And, as he spoke, a pair of shoulders that had not as yet attained their full breadth, rose with a significant shrug alike of contempt and pity.

"Nay, nay, Captain," argued the painter, still working at the face whilst memory was fresh, "I do not admit that. There are

poor men with as strong an appreciation of beauty as the rich. Artistic taste may be cultivated, but the love of beauty is innate; witness the flowers flourishing in broken crocks and blacking-bottles on window-sills in fœtid alleys; the botanists and naturalists amongst our toiling masses; and of the painters, whose genius speaks from the canvas of the past or present—how many think you have been cradled in the lap of luxury? The girl may find a husband in her own rank to love and admire her as truly as any coroneted earl who weds a reigning beauty. But, if I read aright, those dreamy orbs hold no communion with clodhopping.'

"May be you are right; every countryman is not a Peter Bell; and most likely had we heard the rustic damsel speak, her broad *patois* would have dispelled the charm of her marvellous eyes. But are you ready? And is that all you have to show for a morning's work?"

The artist was closing sketch-book and colour-box. "I thought that face was to

make my fortune!" said he, drily, with a smile upon his lips. "And *that* would surely be a fair day's work. Yet, I have something else to show. A sketch I took from the centre of the bridge. Come with me thither and compare the view with this," and he presented his re-opened book to the other.

"See," he continued, with a nod of his head towards the shipyard on their left, "I have brought that schooner's freshly-patched black hull, and half the shipwright's shed into the foreground, with just a fringe of the overhanging Stonar shrubbery beyond; and see, stretching far away into the level distance, the meandering river winding its tortuous way across the sandy flats, with just a single sail to break the monotony, and give life and emotion to the silvery thread of river, the wide expanse of reedy waste, and the faint line of sea on the horizon. You see the river widens to the forefront, where other craft lie moored to wharves barely indicated on our right. How like you it?"

"Well, right well. The dappled sky, the lights and shadows, have been admirably caught for a sketch so slight, and the perspective is beyond all praise. You should make a fine picture from this. But, I say, Hathersage, can your imagination re-cover those flats with rolling billows, and bring up to Sandwich Haven full seas, in which the nation's fleet might have safe anchorage; or, going farther back ere Sandwich was a port, can you imagine what it was when the galleys of Agricola made for the Haven? We see only what lies before us, and all the rest seems a myth, an old wife's tale, and yet we cannot doubt that such has been."

"Ay, Captain, if I shut my eyes and dream, I can see it all. See the painted Briton's coracles before the Roman galley, Elizabeth's cumbrous floating-castles, and the old herring-fleets; build up once more the Priory, reinstate the abbot and set a portcullis in Sandown Gate. Imagination is the faculty of painter and of poet. We

see with the inner sense, and I much misdoubt if history owes not half its charm to the same faculty."

"No doubt, no doubt," assented the captain, with a light laugh. "But will your fertile imagination set a luncheon before a hungry man?"

"It has had to do so before to-day," quoth the other, with a peculiar something in eye and lip; "but I scarcely think the famous fruit of Apelles would be as satisfactory at this moment as a mouthful of ordinary bread and cheese, with a glass of Kentish ale to wash it down. We are not likely to get anything better at a moment's notice in this 'deserted village,' though its inns be legion, but, if you are not dainty regarding accommodation, here at the gate is an 'ancient hostelry' ready to welcome us."

"Ah! the Bohemian instinct! For my own part, I should prefer a less ancient flavour of salt and tar in 'mine inn,' but —as you will." And the captain looked up at the long, low corner inn, where the one

upper-floor overhung the lower, with no great favour.

The assent was given in answer to a whispered suggestion, which Boniface, chatting with the bridge-keeper in front of his own door, might have overheard.

At all events, he gave a nod of intelligence to the "old salt," as he turned lead to the way through the low portals of the "Crispin" to the sacred precincts of the bar-parlour.

There was a smell of spirits and tobacco-smoke about, but otherwise the room was clean, cool, cosy, and private. Boniface himself bustled about to supply their wants.

"Well," said Captain Ainslie to his companion, as he sat down in a round-backed arm-chair, with an angular seat, "the shade is at least refreshing after the hot sun, and who knows but I may have to put up with worse quarters and worse fare if Nicholas and Menschikoff carry out their little programme against 'the sick man.' I smell sulphur and gunpowder in every despatch, and all Europe is on the *qui vive*."

"Ay, ay," assented the other, holding a tall glass of ale in his uplifted hand, "but is a dismal anticipation of war and its discomforts needed to give a zest to nectar such as this, after a long walk under a hot sun? *I* feel the need to fortify myself against the six miles back. 'Here's to the face that is to make my fortune!'" and when the glass was put down it was empty.

"Nay," amended the officer, "say rather, 'To the modest Kentish Maiden, with the wondrous eyes!'" and his own ale went down without any wry face, though it was not champagne.

"As a reason for another glass when I have despatched the ambrosia men call bread and cheese, I accept your toast, Captain, though I have a weak leaning to my own, for its sweet prophetic ring. If I could find the girl, and cajole or bribe her to give me a sitting, I should think I had taken a step on that same road to fortune. I'll have a try for it."

"And fail. Nay, Hathersage, you must

be content to make a picture from the sketch you have, and I will be the purchaser."

"All right. Step the first. Now for step the second."

A tug at a primitive bell-pull brought the landlord into the room so quickly that he must have been pretty near at hand. And if he had looked mysterious when he ushered them into the room, he was doubly so then. His ordinary manner was unknown to his customers, so the change passed muster, even to his hesitation over the reckoning.

"Do you know a Kentish damsel hereabouts like that, or that?" and the artist, opening his book, pointed to a roughly-outlined figure standing on the bridge, and to the more finished face in the corner.

"No more I don't. Dere be no Kent maid anewst* Sandwich had de bly† of dat. Wull, she come from Ramsgit now?" and Boniface shook his head as if in utter ignorance.

* Anewst—nigh to. † Bly—look.

Outside, the artist tackled the bridge-keeper. The man was quite as-oblivious, and had no memory to be stimulated by silver shillings.

Nor had a couple of thirsty loiterers by the inn-door.

Had the strangers, who avoided the steep hill appropriately called the High Street, but looked over their shoulders as they crossed the road and turned into the narrow thoroughfare at the back of the river warehouses called Strand Street, with their faces towards Knightrider Street and Deal, they might have seen other faces at the inn windows and at the door—gripped hands and angry faces; and Fine-ear's gift might have told them they were taken for foreign spies, and that all Barbican Gate was exercised to learn why they wanted to "cajole" or "bribe" "*Our Hetty.*"

CHAPTER II.

THE HAVEN.

'OUR Hetty!" Who was Hetty? And why did so many different rough voices claim her as "*ours?*"

The ever-restless, cruel, and insidious sea, the sea which, smiling, hides so much and tells so little, which makes so much work for geologists, and plays such pranks with our coast line, which centuries ago left historic Sandwich high and dry behind a long stretch of sandy flats, very much nearer to our own time, took the law into its own strong wet hands, and, marching with long strides up the shrinking beach,

closer and closer to Sandown Castle, built on the bare coast between them and Deal, at length took possession of the fortress, almost within sight of sealess Sandwichers. Took possession, as any other powerful enemy, to have and to hold at will, to work destruction withal. The castle, with its four rounded bastions, might have looked over the Downs defiantly, as if mocking Neptune's might too long ; and sometimes with a whisper, and sometimes with a roar, his challenge was proclaimed. The great giant was weary of soft beds of sand, his prey escaped too oft. He determined he would have the castle, hard and firm as a rock, to batter oak, or teak, or iron upon. Let it stand there awhile to look picturesque when tides were low and waves were merciful, so long as it was ready to hand when in his wrath he and the winds fought together for men's lives.

More than eleven years before the sunny day when "Our Hetty" stood waiting and dreaming on Sandwich bridge, for the unsuspected behoof of a wandering artist,

during the highest of high tides, a terrible tempest had burst upon the eastern coast, bringing wreck and desolation.

Great masses of purple cloud had darkened the sun at noon-day, and over the Downs and the whole North Sea the wildest of wild winds had come tearing from the north-east and held a witches' carnival. They beat and buffeted the sea in scorn, and the furious waves rose in their might to claw at the mocking winds and driving rain ; and, failing impotently, fell foul of all that was near and helpless in their tremendous clutch. How many a fishing-smack, how many a merchantman, went down, or was disabled in that terrific storm will never be revealed! The Goodwins are as silent as remorseless.

One, a fine, fast-sailing barque, well manned and officered, laden with wine and fruit from Lisbon, and bound for the port of London, was caught in the swirl of winds and waves, and, after a desperate struggle for the mastery, was hurled against the hard front of Sandown Castle

(then standing firm, and proud of its own strength), as the first proof what they meant to do hereafter.

There was terror in the castle and on the shore at the invasion long ere this occurred, for the dungeons and the moat had been filled by the tide; now there were shrieks from ship and shore, but the shrieks of men and women were lost in the shrieking of the blast, and only blanched faces could tell the common dread!

Back swept the imperious sea, and with it swept the barque, her bows crushed, her bulwarks shattered; and then, as another huge billow came rolling on, bent on destruction, some supreme act of seamanship, some derisive shifting of the wind, carried her out of the huge triton's grasp, and sent her reeling and tumbling out into the open Downs.

Not to safety—that one blow against Sandown walls forbade—only to doom as certain. Masts were snapped, cordage rent, timbers riven, and the waters washing

in and rolling over, made a speedy end of "the fast-sailing barque *Euretta.*"

What of her freight? of the human lives she had had in her keeping?

Who could tell? 'Twas not the only barque that had gone to pieces in that storm. Bodies were washed ashore and reverently buried, casks of wine were found afloat by the Deal boatmen in their stout luggers and claimed as flotsam; others, drifted shorewards by the tide, in less frequented spots, were broached where they lay, without a scruple of ownership, and wine was cheaper in seaside cottages than milk or ale. Whilst, as if in mockery, for many a day the waves played at ball with oranges, and as they went bobbing up and down, or tumbled in with the tide, lads and lasses ran bare legged into the surf to rescue the golden fruit.

Those said brave and sturdy Deal boatmen had gone forth, almost in the teeth of the storm, to rescue life and property, and earned the gratitude of many a thankful soul. But their harvest did not end with

the storm. The sea was strewn with wreckage, and amongst their many gleanings was a painted figurehead; a woman with a sky-blue flowing robe, and her name in golden letters on her belt—"Euretta."

A young military cadet from Sandhurst, whose name was Paul Ainslie, happened to be in Deal at the time. He had been at once awed and fascinated by the storm; and all the following day he seemed to haunt the shore in restless excitement, now here, now there. Standing in the evening on the spot whence a wooden pier was to run four years later, he watched the lugger *Saucy Jane* come in with the figurehead and other drift in tow.

Lad-like, he joined the curious crowd upon the beach, as the entangled mass was hauled up; the first cry being it was "a drowned woman."

He it was who read the peculiar name out aloud to them, whilst an old fisherman, learned in his calling, but not in bookish lore, spelled the letters slowly one by one, and boggled at the word "Euretta."

There were officials busy on the beach to whom the name and figurehead served as a clue for communication with Lloyds' and the luckless owners.

The boy, Paul Ainslie, listening to speculations anent the *Euretta*, her crew and cargo, rolled the semi-classic word upon his tongue, and carried it away with him to Sandhurst, not to be forgotten whilst the previous night of storm and wreck was remembered; and its impression was ineffaceable.

In the early light of morning, after the wind had spent its fury, a broad, flat-keeled vessel, built on the coast for the Dutch trade, made its well-known way, after a prolonged tussle with the spirits of the storm, into the Sandwich Haven, when any gayer craft, not Deal or Dutch built, must have come to grief on the sands.

Besides her cargo of butter and cheese, *The Lass of Kent* had on board a woman and a child, found together alone and adrift in an open boat.

When discovered, the woman was sit

ting almost up to her knees in water that threatened to swamp the boat, her arms clasped round the child on her lap, which was closely wrapped in a seaman's waterproof. And, lest the mother's strength or clasp might fail, they were lashed together and to the seat, and swathed in rugs and covers, over all, like one great mummy.

All skill and care had been given to their warmth and security, but whether the boat had capsized and righted itself, or had shipped seas, and their long exposure to driving spray and rain had served to drench them, could only be imagined.

They had been rescued from their perilous position, during a brief lull in the tempest, and then only at the hazard of men's lives.

It was a daring feat to swing at a rope's end into the tossing boat and make it fast to *The Lass of Kent*, the poor half-drowned mother being too numb with cold and wet, too dazed with fright to put out a hand to save herself had she been free and not fast.

It was almost as hazardous to attempt

her release whilst the boat rocked and swayed on the unquiet sea, but binding knots were severed with a knife, and they were hauled on board together as they were, as helpless as logs; only the wail of a child proclaiming animation. The boat broke away almost at that instant, their deliverer saying "it was a close shave," as he scrambled on deck.

Fortunately, the wife of Kit Blean, the skipper, was on board; a woman strong of voice and limb and nerve, full of human sympathy, but not helplessly tender.

Mrs Blean's cabin was not large, and the floor was far from level as a drawing-room, but she had a stout heart and a stout pair of sea-legs, and when the half-dead mother and child were surrendered to her keeping—not a man of the small crew could be spared below — she did all for them her humanity and experience prompted.

She tried the efficacy of unadulterated Hollands as an inward and outward application on mother and child both, and, finding

that under the oilskin wrap the latter's body was comparatively dry and warm, she handed it over to a big lad of her own, with a charge to chafe its cramped limbs till it cried, a charge he obeyed to the letter.

Meanwhile Dinah herself was not idle. The gasping of both at the strong liquor had been an assurance of vitality. At once she set about to remove the mother's drenched outer wraps, and to wring the wet from soaking skirts. To change garments was impossible with the floor at all angles and her own equilibrium so insecure; but she stripped her berth of its blankets and rolled them round the helpless form with an instinctive knowledge of a "water-cure" process not derived from books.

The cabin was close and warm, the blankets were thick, the Hollands a potential specific, and ere long the saturated clothes —of finer texture than Mrs Blean's—ceased to chill, and began to warm. It was not, however, until the little one, roused by rough kindness to a perception of strange

faces and strange surroundings, cried for "Mamma!" that the quivering of lips and eyelids betokened returning consciousness.

The child's piteous cry had stirred the feeble heart and given the sinking pulse the fillip that was needed.

"There," cried the good woman, as she watched the white face by the light of the swinging lamp, "that's just what I wanted. Give the little lass that, Chriss, she be hungry," and a piece of roughly-buttered bread was put into the little one's trembling hand, to appease at once its hunger and its anxieties. It was more than bread and butter could do.

All this while the rolling and straining of the vessel, the dash of waters, the shrill whistling of the wind had continued, with now and then a temporary lull to give the weary mariners a breathing space.

The fury of the storm was well-nigh spent before Dinah's good offices were more thoroughly rewarded. She had watched uneasily for some time, with the child on her own lap, when she saw, by the flicker-

ing light of her overhanging lamp, a little warmth come over the ashen-grey face, the eyes open, the lips part, and soon a faint voice murmur, "Etta, Etta."

Little arms outstretched at the sound, and "Mamma, mamma!" came in quick response.

"Thank God for all His mercies! She be coming round," cried Dinah Blean fervently.

Straightway she placed the little one on the bunk beside her mother, saying soothingly, "Here, Hetty, kiss mammy. All safe now, Hetty."

"Hetty" was the rendering of the name most familiar to Mrs Blean's ear and tongue. The child was not skilled in niceties of sound. The mother only answered her soft kisses with "Etta, Etta;" and long before she was capable of explanation, the aspirated version had been adopted, and clung to the girl.

When at last *The Lass of Kent* had navigated the Stour, and was safely moored by the quay-side, the skipper was free to

go below and inquire about the castaways. It was over sleeping "Hetty" he bent a rugged but kindly face. And when townspeople near the quay, kept awake by the storm, came flocking round to hail their safe arrival, it was as "Hetty" the pretty child was shown to Fogge the bridge-keeper (who lived beside the gate), to mine host of the "Crispin," and also to the Rev. Austin Ughtred and to Dr Manningham, both of whom had been drawn thither by the swiftly-circulated intelligence that a shipwrecked lady needed attention.

"So you've turned the lady's wet clothing into a sort of vapour bath! Very good, very good, Mrs Blean; in fact, the best thing you could have done under the circumstances. In all probability she owes her life to your care," said the doctor, who had felt the garments steaming under the blankets, and then had his fingers on an intermitting pulse. "But the question is, What is to be done with her? She is in a very critical state—no doubt owing to the shock as much as to the immersion—

and, in fact, though scarcely fit to be removed, is still less fit to remain here."

Indeed, she was utterly incapable of giving a lucid answer to a question; all she could say was "Etta, Etta," whenever the child was taken from her, as if she had only an instinctive perception left.

There followed an immediate consultation on deck, the result of which was the removal of the helpless creature and her child to the "Crispin," the clergyman and the doctor between them guaranteeing expenses to the landlord, in case friends did not claim her, though it is only justice to say he repudiated the necessity for such guarantee as a stigma on his humanity.

Let us not speculate how much the lady's finger-rings, or the heavy gold chain round her neck, had to do with the care bestowed on her by one and all; let us give Christian compassion full credit, and waive human weakness into the background.

For, though there was a valuable gold watch attached to the chain, and the chain of the period was more than a yard long

and thick as a child's finger, they would hardly have served as payment for all that lady and her daughter required during the long weeks in which she remained an unknown, unnamed stranger, dependent for food, physic, care, clothing, to the kindness more than the expectations of others, seeing that the watch had been ruined with sea-water, and that no friends had come forward with claim or inquiry.

And long before it was known that she was the wife (or widow) of Karl Fleming, the commander of the ill-fated barque *Euretta*, or that the child had been named after his ship, the pretty little Euretta had been petted and fondled by the wives and daughters of doctor and clergyman, as well as trades-people and fisher folk, the frequenters of the innkeeper's bar-parlour, to say nothing of good Mrs Blean and the brave skipper, whenever *The Lass of Kent* came into port. Then she ran about the gate and the bridge under the watchful eyes of Jack Fogge, lingered to prattle to his old wife in their neat parlour, which almost

seemed a part of the old stone barbican, and, as if by general adoption and consent, was dubbed "Our Hetty."

For that which gave permanence to the pronoun we must crave the reader's patience.

We have at least shown that when Boniface, the bridge-keeper, and others disclaimed all knowledge of "Our Hetty's" painted semblance, as presented by Pierce Hathersage, they had disregarded truth. They had justified the malversation to themselves, no doubt. They set up the lie as a barrier between Hetty and a—supposition.

CHAPTER III.

MRS FLEMING'S FRIENDS.

THE "Bell," in Strand Street, was a much larger inn than the "Crispin." Under its roof King Charles II. had been entertained; it had stabling and accommodation for the yeomen and farmers who drove into Sandwich for the corn-market on Wednesdays; and it had a sort of frontage to the river, its taproom standing broadly forth upon the quay, whilst the "Crispin" had little to boast of but its antiquity.

Anyone not in the secret might have expected that "Hetty" and her mother

would have been borne straightway to the nearer and larger hostelry.

But if the landlord was on the quay at the time, he was not one of the special few Kit Blean invited into his cabin, or he might have been as ready to open charitable doors to the castaways as mine host of the smaller tavern. Indeed, he was heard to say that he "thought the 'Bell' would have been a much fitter refuge for a *lady*." For when the lady and her child were carried under the Barbican Gate to the low-roofed "Crispin," it was expected that a few hours' or at most a few days' rest and quiet would set her up again.

It was also anticipated that when properly conscious she would give some account of herself, some clue to her connections, or the ship whence she had been cast adrift, so that her friends might be communicated with.

That she had friends anxious for tidings of her fate, friends who would rush to reward her deliverers, and claim her and her child with joy and gratitude, was taken for

granted. The texture of her linen, of her full-skirted silken dress, of her shawls and cloak, in which they were both enveloped, no less than her jewellery, were suggestive of abundant means, not to say wealth. And the wealthy are seldom without friends.

Then the imperfect prattle of the lovely and artless little child was English, and what more likely than a belief that friends were English too, and, therefore, at hand.

But many weeks went by — weeks in which torpor and delirium alternated. Long immersion had brought on rheumatic fever, and the shock to the nervous system had acted on a brain never over strong. Yet, though the fat and fussy little doctor had rubbed his bald pate, and brushed back with both hands the white hairs that bristled up around his crown, and brought out as a rarely-failing source of inspiration the silver snuff-box, known as a tribute from a grateful patient, when discussing the "interesting case," in acknowledged doubt and perplexity, with the benevolent,

but lank-bodied, lean-visaged clergyman, who had been his joint-guarantee for "expenses," he never rubbed up the sublime idea of advertising.

Nor did there seem more inspiration in the many pinches of "lundy-foote" he dispensed to his intimates, for never a Sandwicher suggested what would now-a-days be the first thought.

Forty years ago the newspaper press had not obtained its present proportions—had not entered so closely into the homes and lives of the people. There were events looming in the far distance which would waken up the activities and test the powers of the press, but the first stirring of the whirlwind had not begun to be felt. Then advertising was regarded neither as a science nor a fine art, and the "agony column" had yet to be recognised as such. Certainly it was not a known fact in Sandwich, if at all.

Even when reason regained her seat, and the sick lady was able to note her surroundings, and answer her hostess that her

name was "Fleming," such an outburst of passionate grief followed, that Dr Manningham forbade further questioning.

Indeed a relapse, and more than a relapse, might be expected to follow, he told the innkeeper's wife.

"Yes, you are curious, no doubt. So are we all curious. But we must keep our curiosity bottled up like wine, until it is ripe for use. Mrs Fleming is low, very low; this agitation will throw her back considerably. In fact, so prostrate is her condition, that any premature reminder of what she must have suffered or lost in the storm might cause her to slip through our fingers, Mrs Tilby—and—and—in fact, we can hardly afford that." A significant tap on the brown head of little Hetty, and a glance as significant, pointed his speech, as he bowed himself out.

"In fact, sir," said he to the Rev. Austin Ughtred, whom he met in Strand Street, not far from St Mary's Church, half-an-hour later, rapping the lid of his silver snuff-box with his well-covered knuckles

as he spoke, "though perfectly well meaning, Mrs Tilby's curiosity is apt to outrun her discretion, and it was needful to give it a check. In fact, sir, we must not only wait until the poor young creature is stronger, but we must approach the subject of the storm with caution. We know not whom she may have lost, or what horrors she may have witnessed. There is certainly some great load on her mind. The subject will have to be approached with great tact and delicacy — when she can bear it—and—a—in fact, I wish you, sir, would undertake the office. I know no fitter man for the task. A painful one it is sure to be."

"Suppose, doctor, we wait until Mrs Fleming—I think you said that was her name—until she questions *us?*" was the reverend gentleman's reply. "Much interrogation will not be necessary, I imagine. She will be as anxious for our intelligence as we for hers. I have seen how eagerly and wistfully her eyes followed her lovely little child, and then wandered round the

room as if in search of some missing face or faces."

"You are quite right, Mr Ughtred, so far" (with another dip into his box), "and I advise waiting—but only until the patient's nerves are stronger. And if we don't take the initiative, someone else will who has *no tact*. In fact, sir—and it's but human nature, — the Tilbys are getting uneasy about the bill running up, and are speculating how far our hasty guarantee may be depended upon.'

"Have they said anything?" asked the other gravely.

"Not exactly, but I've seen it in their faces, and in speculations on the value of the poor creature's trinkets ; and—and—in fact, though I'm as willing as any man to forego fees in such a case, I'm a family man—and, and—"

'You would like to be satisfied who is to meet the innkeeper's bill?' put in the other, with a faint smile.

"Well,—not exactly," replied the doctor, unwilling to have his motives probed too

closely; "but I think Mrs Tilby is. She said to-day, the people at the 'Bell' were glad to have missed the charge, and she thought Mrs Fleming had no friends!"

"Then, doctor, it behoves us to prove the contrary! Good morning;" and the clergyman, who had walked back with him, went his way up a wofully narrow and uninviting road called Bowling Street, where the houses were all of the poorer class, to Vicarage Lane, a short *lane* shut in by blank walls, without hedge or tree, with its other outlet in Church Street, and where the long, low, unpretentious Vicarage was the only respectable abode. And only the doorway gave distinction to that.

He was a man not more than thirty-five years of age, with a pale face, broad high forehead, and deep-set serious eyes, which seemed to have grown sad with looking on the sorrows and sins around him. His face narrowed to the chin, and already pitiful lines were deepening around his mouth—a mouth with tender and com-

passionate curves and smiles, if it never broke into broad laughter.

After the doctor's hint he left Mrs Tilby small chance to satisfy impatient curiosity to the injury of the patient, and there were whispers in the bar-parlour that "between doctor, vicar, and the vicar's housekeeper, there would not be a rag of carpet left on the stairs."

You see, Mrs Tilby had not been consulted in the arrangement which placed an invalid and a child in her charge to be nursed and tended for an indefinite period, with indefinite results, and good nature has its limits.

Her womanly instincts and her commercial ones were at variance. She began to reproach her husband with his precipitation and imprudence, but for all that she never suffered her vigilant watch of the invalid to relax, or made anything but a pet of the child, who somehow reminded her of a little one of her own, long laid to rest under a green coverlet in St Clement's Churchyard.

That she had fine fibres in her nature, and that they had been stirred by Etta's forlorn condition, was shown in the conversion of a sacred little wardrobe laid up in lavender, to the poor wee stranger's use, and in the care bestowed on her glossy dark hair.

Of her time and toil she gave ungrudgingly and without stint; the limit of her good nature was the cost—the cost in coin.

Mrs Tilby and Dr Manningham were not so widely different after all, even in the matter of curiosity, but his was kept in check by scientific knowledge; as was that of the Rev. Austin Ughtred by a delicate shrinking from the infliction of pain.

The landlady, as had been anticipated, forestalled both of them, in spite of caution.

There were two entrances to the "Crispin." One to the bar, the other nearer to the Barbican, a two-leaved door opening almost at the foot of the private staircase, between the bar and a smoking-room to the right.

Five or six days had gone by since his conversation with Dr Manningham, when

the clergyman bent his tall head to enter at this double door, but ere he could set his foot on the first stair, which was barely a stride for his long legs, Mrs Tilby darted out of the bar to confront him, with a face and tone of importance, in which habitual awe of the vicar was lost.

"Lawcus heart! sir, what do you think?" she began. "Why, the poor thing upstairs was on board the barque that struck on Sandown Castle, and her husband was the captain. I only just asked if the figure-head of his ship was a woman with a blue skirt, and a queer name on her belt, when she screamed out '*The Euretta!*' and I thought all had gone to wrongs with her again. The doctor's with her, and I think she's all to rights now, but I got feared."

"Dr Manningham advised you to be cautious, Mrs Tilby," said the vicar, in accents of rebuke.

"But that was a week ago, sir, and one cannot always have one's wits about one."

"So it would seem," he remarked, quietly. "What more did your wisdom suggest?"

"Why, sir, when she cried and begged so hard to know the worst, I could not help telling her that the barque had gone to pieces, and not a soul had been saved but her and Hetty."

"And what then?" he asked, gravely.

"Why, she fell back in a dead faint; and Tilby ran off helter-skelter for the doctor. But, lawcus heart! I meant no harm, no more I didn't. I only said she might be thankful she and Hetty were saved."

"Ah! and also thankful that her husband was lost?" and to the speaker's caustic tone was added a keen, sideway glance at Mrs Tilby's conscience-smitten countenance, as, with his hand on the balustrade, he put a second foot forward.

"No, sir! no more I didn't," she answered, sharply; "not but what some husbands are better lost than found," and with that she retreated to her customers in the bar, leaving him free to join the doctor in the room above.

It was a room with a window overlooking Strand Street. Beneath this window stood

a small oaken chest of drawers, which did duty as a dressing-table ; and close beside stood the head of a four-post bed hung with chintz of a by-gone pattern, the tester of which touched the low ceiling.

Propped on pillows little whiter than the face that pressed them, lay the fair-haired woman for whom death had been fighting by sea and on shore.

She did not seem more than five or six-and-twenty, and might be younger. There had been a certain kind of beauty in the face, but there had never been strength or power, and the sharpening fingers of pain had left their marks upon it.

Little Etta, in a dark frock and pink pinafore, lay coiled on the white coverlet, with her brown head nestling against the fair one—her mother's only solace.

On a chair by the bedside sat the doctor, a labelled phial and wine-glass on the dressing-table behind him telling of a draught he had administered. There, too, lay a gold watch and chain.

As the vicar entered the room, head

foremost, with a stoop rendered natural by long practice in low doorways, the doctor held up his finger to bespeak caution.

"Hush! she is sleeping, and I think the worst is over," he said, in low tones, as he gave his hand to the other's clasp; "she will no doubt be calm and reasonable when she awakes. In fact, that blundering woman downstairs has done less harm than might have been expected; and she has spared us a painful task."

"Has Mrs Fleming said anything to you?"

"Not much. But I have other patients to see. Can you take my place so as to be at hand if she awakes clear-headed?"

The vicar assented. He took the vacated chair, drew a book from his pocket, and read to fill the time, and something more, for ere long he lost himself in his study.

An hour or more had gone by, during which, it seemed as if the ordinary noises of the house and the corner had been thoughtfully stilled.

"You are very kind, sir," said a faint voice, from the pillows, breaking the stillness; "all are very kind. I—know not how I shall ever repay it."

"Gather strength, my dear madam, and that will repay us."

"Ah, yes; perhaps *you*, sir, you are the —clergyman? But—but," and tears seemed welling up into the blue eyes, "I have been — ill a long time, and there is the doctor—and—"

"Oh, don't trouble about the doctor, he only wants to get you off his hands."

"And the—the person of the house, she tells me we have been here for more than six weeks. She will want us off her hands too, and how am I to pay—"

"You must not talk, Mrs Fleming. Keep your mind easy. The Lord will provide."

She was silent a few moments as if pondering his speech. Then she began afresh,—

"Yes, yes—but I must talk, or how *will* you understand. It is so miserable to lie

and think—and to be helpless" (she had almost lost the use of her lower limbs), "and friendless, twice wrecked as it were, and not to know—" and here she began to sob.

"The Eternal Friend who drew you and your little one out of the deep waters, will not leave you helpless if you seek Him. And here am I, His servant, ready to write to any relative you may desire to send for."

"Oh, sir, the cruel waves have swallowed up the only friend left to me!" She burst into fresh lamentation. "Oh, my poor Carl! my dear husband! torn from us so terribly!"

A little arm stole round her neck, a little cheek was pressed to hers, and the child he had thought asleep said pitifully, "Don't ky, mamma, don't ky. Etta don't like to see mamma ky." Deeply moved, he left her grief time to subside. Then he asked, gently, "Have you no brother, no father?"

At the word "father," she clasped her thin hands together, and cried, piteously, "Father? ah, the kindest, best; but he has discarded, disowned me. He cast me off when Carl took me to sea with him."

"Then had you married without his consent?"

"No."

She put forth a thin hand and pointed towards the watch and chain on the dressing-table.

"Father gave me ten thousand pounds and that gold watch and chain on the condition that Carl should make our home in his, and that I should never be taken from him, or to sea. Oh, it was an unlucky promise!"

"Unlucky in the making or the breaking?" put the clergyman.

"Both, said she," in a tone of distress.

And then, bit by bit, she told, with many a sobbing interruption, how, after a voyage or two, Carl had insisted upon taking her with him, and how her father had bade her make choice between the two, and when she had clung to her husband, her father had cast her off in a rage, which had terrified her. But she did not say how she had pined for her husband in his absence, or how, on his return, her

fretful tears at a fresh parting had wrought upon his affections—ay, to the forfeiture of his word. And she could not tell what Carl had done with her fortune. She did not know.

But the vicar gathered that Martin Copeland, the great city merchant, was a man to whom a promise was as binding as a sealed bond, and that his resentment was against the man who had deceived him, not against his only child. He felt assured that he had only to write and lay before the offended father a simple statement of the condition in which his child and grandchild were cast among strangers, and forgiveness would surely follow.

Mrs Fleming was not so sanguine. Her own appeals for reconcilation had been all unanswered.

"Perhaps, sir, if you enclosed your letter in one to my aunt, Mrs Norreys, who came to live with us in Russell Square before my marriage, and if you gave my dear love to her, and asked her, for little Etta's sake, to intercede with him, he might be moved to

pity. If not"—here her eyes turned to the jewellery on the table,—"will you please tell me if the chain and rings would pay Mrs Tilby if sold?" she sighed heavily; "I should not like to part with the watch, unless—"

He did not say the watch was spoiled and all but worthless, only "Time enough for that, madam, when other sources fail. Pray look forward cheerfully."

He pressed her thin hand reassuringly, patted the brown head of Etta, nestling against her mother's shoulder as if for mutual comfort, and left the room to set Mrs Tilby's fears at rest and her tongue in motion, with the announcement that Mrs Fleming's father was a rich London merchant, with whom he was about to communicate.

CHAPTER IV.

A TUNE ON A VIOLIN.

THE vicar's letters were written and despatched.

Mrs Fleming, more composed now the first shock was over, was gaining strength, and had been lifted from the bed to an easy-chair, but was as yet quite unable to use her feet, or to stand. It is probable that she was reviving under the influence of hope.

But as one day after another died out, and no one either came or wrote, the wistful eagerness with which she listened for the postman's foot in the street, changed

to doubt and disappointment as hope died with the days.

Then, weary of Mrs Tilby's wonderings and comments, she asked for pen and ink, and herself made a pathetic appeal to her father's heart for the sake of her "fatherless Euretta."

The tear-stained epistle came back under cover to the Rev. Austin Ughtred, with a few curt lines from Mrs Norreys, to say that "Mr Copeland refused to hold any communication whatsoever with his ungrateful daughter. She had forsaken him. No further appeal for or by her would be regarded or answered. He was not the man to change or waver. The five-pound note enclosed was from her own purse, but no more would be forthcoming, as she risked her brother's displeasure in sending that, and her private income was not a large one."

With these in his hand the good vicar sought Dr Manningham, whom he found on his own door-step in King Street. "What do you think of that?" he asked.

"Think?" said the doctor, when he had

read the epistle, 'It is a case of unmitigated barbarity. Unfortunately it is not without parallel. In fact, I attended a man who— But perhaps you are in haste, and so am I, a man at the Black Mill has broken his leg."

"Then I will walk with you," said the vicar, well accustomed to the doctor's incompleted instances. "I wish to have your opinion about the five-pound note. My own inclination would be to send it back, but I fear we cannot venture to do that."

"Send it back!" cried the little doctor aghast, "when the poor creature has not a penny, and Mrs Tilby is in a fidget about her bill. In fact, she gave me a strong hint yesterday that she wanted paying, and said, if it had not been for little Hetty, she could not have waited so long; that it was like Tilby's thoughtlessness saddling her with a sick woman and child; that the 'Bell' took most of the water-side custom, and had a right to take such chances— she had not."

"Then you think this had better be flung as a sop to the Tilbys?"

"Yes, yes; but what then? Even if we amputate her bill, if there is no more cash to follow, what is to become of the poor woman? We cannot treat her as a common pauper."

"Charity forbid!" ejaculated the vicar.

"And I fear she will be disabled for life," continued the other. "In fact, she will want a pair of crutches out of that bank-note."

"It is a sad case, a very sad case," ruminated Austin Ughtred; "a terrible fall for one reared in luxury; but I should think she would have some claim on the shipowners. At all events, we can but try And, doctor, if you will lend me your cob, I will ride over to Canterbury to-morrow, and do my best in converting the poor creature's few trinkets into coin, as Mrs Tilby suggested to her long ago."

They had reached the curious old house in Strand Street (recently rebuilt) where Queen Elizabeth had lodged, and there they parted, the one bustling off to the

Black Mill, which stood beyond the Walls on the Richborough road, the other retracing his steps thoughtfully with his hands clasped behind him, until he reached the "Crispin."

The letter was a sad blow to Mrs Fleming's new hopes, and she wept copiously; said her "aunt and father must both be dreadfully changed;" that "it was only natural she should want to be with her husband, and that her aunt had no need to be niggardly with her bank-notes, they were plentiful enough when she was at home."

It was some time before the vicar could get her to look broadly into the facts of the case, with reference to the future; she could but weep, lament her helplessness, and her inability to see what was to be done. She was one of those weak, clinging women who, like the woodbine, need support and training; had been a pretty inanity, petted, spoiled, and utterly unfitted to combat with the world. One of those women who expect everything to be done for them—and get it too, as a rule.

She assented to every proposition, was thankful to have a few pounds for Mrs Tilby, was disconsolate at the prospect of the crutch, and gave up her trinkets readily if ruefully, retaining only her father's watch and a brooch containing a portrait of the lost captain, Carl Fleming; it was set round with opals, and in good preservation, having been worn in her bosom.

The five-pound note was handed over to Mrs Tilby intact, and a wonderfully soothing influence it had. Loud were her denunciations of "unnatural fathers who could leave a sweet innocent like Hetty to the mercy of strangers," and many her protests that "the little darling should never want a friend while she lived; and as for the clothes she had found her, she should think it a sin to charge for them."

Moreover, in private confidence she imparted to her husband her opinion that perhaps they had, as the vicar had said, entertained angels unawares, so many profitable customers had the child and her

mother brought to the "Crispin," either out of kindness or curiosity.

Having put his hand to the plough, the Rev. Austin Ughtred was not the one to turn back. He argued that the very heartlessness of Mrs Fleming's relations made his duty as a minister of God only the more urgent.

He journeyed to Canterbury with her few trinkets; he wrote at once to the shipowners.

The result of his journey was ten guineas; of his letter to the shipowners a bundle of clerky correspondence and considerable delay.

It appeared that two seamen, one a Portuguese, had been picked up from the floating mainmast, and on claiming their wages had severally made affidavit that the loss of the *Euretta* was mainly due to the captain's wife, who distracted his attention from the charge of his ship to care for herself and child. That, such being the case, Captain Fleming was liable to forfeit more than the moneys due to him.

This she denied, said that she and Etta were not placed in the boat until all hope of saving the barque was gone, and that the Portuguese sailor had sent them adrift in revenge on the captain, who had threatened to punish him for disobedience and laziness.

Her denial was duly attested and forwarded, and then came, after some delay, thirty pounds, not in acknowledgment of any claim, but as a compassionate subscription from the three partners in relief of the widow's distress.

The utter helplessness and incapacity of some women seems to touch the heart of man like the helplessness of infancy. Especially must it be so when the woman is comparatively young and pretty, is refined and well-bred, and has been overwhelmed by a sudden calamity.

The vicar of St Mary's was never known to turn a deaf ear to either age or ugliness in distress, but he was man enough to be unconsciously stirred by common human influences, and he had never taken

up a cause with more earnestness than when, as he said to the doctor, he felt as if they had two children on their hands to think and act for.

Sandwich, small as is the town, has three parish churches,—St Peter's, St Clement's, and St Mary's. The two latter are now united under one vicar, but at that time they were separate, and not very magnificent livings.

It so happens that, although the "Crispin" is situated at a corner of Strand Street, and almost in a line parallel with St Mary's Church, it lies within the parish of St Clement's, a church in the opposite direction.

It was no sooner bruited abroad that a lady and her child had been rescued from shipwreck and lay at the little inn, than the vicar of St Clement's and his wife called together, fondled the little girl, made inquiries, but finding that the vicar of St Mary's had "taken up the case," departed in a huff at the unwarrantable intrusion beyond his own parish boundary.

They did not even console themselves on being spared the trouble and cost, until a few weeks later, when it reached their ears that the lady had no friends, and that the Rev. Austin Ughtred and Dr Manningham had "passed their word for Tilby's bill."

"You are well out of it, my dear," said the lady complacently. "I only wonder what Mrs Manningham will say to it."

Her 'say' had not made the doctor too comfortable over his impulsive generosity.

And not too comfortable did St Clement's vicar feel when his brother cleric of St Mary's called upon him in behalf of the widow, at the modest red brick house in Knightrider Street, near the church, which served him in lieu of a vicarage.

He sat stiffly silent, listening to the earnest missionary's explanatory proem; but no sooner did he comprehend that he was called upon as the vicar of St Clement's to consider how the unfortunate

lady and her child could be provided for in the future, than he comfortably washed his hands of the whole business.

"Yes, sir, the 'Crispin' *is* in my parish, you say; but I do not see that these strangers are in my cure. Moreover, when you officiously intermeddled with my parishioners, the Tilbys, and left your own parish work to meddle with mine, I washed my hands of the whole business."

"Charity is of *no* parish," answered the other, rising, "or I should not have intruded on yours. Its domain is the world. Good day, sir."

He was more successful with the rector of St Peter's, though he, too, talked of parish limits, and feared to intrude on his neighbour's province; but he did bestir himself, and the two together waited upon the mayor to discuss the possibility of finding the widow and her child a home in one or other of the old monkish hospitals or almshouses connected with the town, and in the gift of the corporation.

Their reception was cordial; but though

the mayor confessed he was "willing to strain a point in such an extreme case," the laxity of old rule was of the past, and barriers rose on all sides.

Not merely her child, but her age (or want of it), excluded Mrs Fleming from St Bartholomew's, no brother or sister being admitted younger than sixty.

"I thought, Mr Mayor, that the 'Harbinge' of St John's, being chartered for Pilgrims, might open its doors to the lady and child both," said the rector; "one woman was admitted with her four children, and is there now."

"Yes, sir," replied the mayor; "but that was an abuse of the charity; still, the woman was the widow of a *freeman*, and only such are eligible. The shelter for pilgrims was only temporary, and has fallen into desuetude in the lapse of centuries and of pilgrimages. The shipwrecked lady has no claim, either as a pilgrim or a native of the town. I am sorry we cannot help her; but so it is. Can Mrs Fleming do nothing towards her own support?"

"Until she can use her crutches, she will be unable even to wait on herself or child," was Austin Ughtred's reply. "But she has had a good education; is, she tells me, a fair needlewoman; was a good musician before she went to sea, and, if she had but a home, might *in time* earn her own living —if the mayoress and other ladies would interest themselves to procure her work and pupils. But the first thing is to find her a home, and since no public charity is open to her needs, I must see what can be done in my own area."

"You know she can have coals free, on application to the churchwardens," struck in the rector.

"She will require much more than coals. She will need a house and furniture, if she is to keep a school, and at least food and shelter until she can," said her thoughtful advocate. "Then, save the change of linen sent at the outset by the mayoress for Mrs Fleming's use, she is almost destitute of raiment. Mrs Tilby, good woman, supplied the sweet little one with clothes from

a sacred store of her own; and she declares the mother's outer garments are utterly ruined by the sea water; indeed, that she will want clothing, to be commonly decent."

"No doubt, no doubt! I'll name it to Mrs Rolfe; she knows more of such matters than I, and will not require prompting," responded the mayor quickly, bowing them out.

Walking homewards, with his hands behind him, as was his wont, the exigencies of his new trust upon his mind, the vicar's ear was arrested by the melody of Cowper's solemn hymn, "God moves in a mysterious way," vibrating on the strings of a well-known violin, under the touch of no uncertain bow.

The musician struck a chord he had not anticipated.

The clergyman paused, smiled, as if a difficulty was clearing away, and, instead of crossing into Church Street on his way home, turned the handle of a cottage door opposite to the church porch, and stepped without ceremony over the threshold.

Passing through a neat front parlour over a clean rag carpet, he entered a back apartment, one corner of which was occupied with a very low stool, bundles of osiers, and an unfinished basket. A middle-aged woman, in a dark cotton gown, was placing a saucepan on the fire; and standing by the table, in front of the window, as if for the benefit of the light, stood the musician in his shirt-sleeves handling his bow, a man almost as thin and tall as himself, one who had no need of the light; for he was sightless.

It was Will Ashurst, basket-maker, and leader of St Mary's choir. There was no organ in the church, and it was before the day of harmoniums.

The wife, a homely woman, who wore a spotless white muslin cap, primly frilled around her plain but pleasant face, curtsied respectfully, and hastened to dust a dustless chair with her check apron, touching her husband on the arm as she passed.

"Will, here be the vicar."

The bow quivered on the strings for an

instant, then was lifted, and the man whose whole being had been surrendered to the divine strain, lowering his instrument, confronted their visitor, as if he saw him.

"Mr Ashurst," said the vicar, more respectful than he might have been to a different man nearer his own rank, "could you contrive for a short time to make room for the shipwrecked lady and her child now at the 'Crispin,' or rather could your wife? For I must tell you she is likely to be very helpless for some time, and, although quite a lady, will now be compelled to sew or teach for her own maintenance and her child's."

"Ay, ay, sir, and welcome," cried the man impulsively.

"Well, sir," answered the woman, more hesitatingly, "our poor place be never fit for a lady, no more it don't—but—if, as you say, she be reduced to get her own living, maybe she could put up with it, and a child in the house would be a God-send to Will."

"Ay, ay," interrupted he, "a blessing comes with a child."

"She could have the parlour and front bedroom, sir. We could make shift with the back, couldn't us, Will?"

"Ay, ay, Matty."

Nothing had as yet been said about payment, but before the vicar left he had arranged for the reception of Mrs Fleming and Euretta, on terms as creditable to them as to herself.

Scrupulously clean was Mrs Ashurst's little parlour; but though the narrow limits of a ship's cabin had familiarised Mrs Fleming with want of space, no luxury had been spared in the cabin's adornment, and the poverty of her new surroundings affected her keenly.

When Fogge and a man from the quay carried her, well wrapped up, in an arm-chair, straight from the street into her parlour, without any intermediate passage, she noted not the fire blazing in the old-fashioned grate to welcome her, not the cleanliness of the well-washed chintz cover

of the squab sofa and easy-chair surrendered for her use, not the brightness of the brass fender and fireirons, and the candlesticks on the low mantelshelf—only the common order of things, and the want of privacy in a room opening direct on the street.

Her first ejaculation told it.

"Is *this* my room? Is there no entrance-hall? Oh, dear!"

Neither the words nor the heavy sigh which followed were lost on Mrs Ashurst. She, however, had a large fund of sympathy to draw upon; had been a domestic in a great house before her marriage, so could imagine what Mrs Fleming's loss had been; and, as she removed wraps, helped her new inmate to the sofa, dismissed the men, and set out her best teacups on her best tray, chatting the while to lively little Euretta, who danced about delighted with the novelty, she said to herself,—

"Poor thing! Lame, and lost all! It's a fearsome blow for her. No doubt she do feel the difference. We must be very patient with her."

A good deal of patience was needed. Never having been trained to self-denial, Mrs Fleming had neither perception nor knowledge of any self-sacrifice on the part of those who had opened their door to lodgers for the first time in their lives, and who gave up their best of all things for her use. She saw only meanness and poverty in her surroundings. When the ship-brokers' donation came, a few articles of furniture were added to brighten her rooms, but nothing would reconcile her to her new life—not even the artless caresses of her child. And had she foreseen how many years she would have to exist under that lowly roof, it is more than likely her brain would again have lost its balance.

CHAPTER V.

THE PINCH OF POVERTY.

THE traveller through Strand Street, with his face set towards Canterbury or Richborough, would pass between the long, low, one-sided church of St Mary on the left, and Will Ashurst's modest dwelling on the right—one of two with red-tiled gable-roofs—more inclined to note the divergence of the church from the parallel line of street, or the "King's Arms" thrusting itself squarely forth at the other corner of Church Street, than any peculiarity possessed by the modest dwelling occupied by the musical basket-maker, unless he had an eye

for shining windows and well-washed paint.

But blind Will might have told you that from those windows you could look far up Church Street and see when the vicar was coming; just as the admiring eyes of Mrs Ashurst followed him when he crossed the road, beaming with satisfaction at the arrangement he had made.

"I am glad that business is settled," he said to himself, as his hands again went behind him. "It is better than the almshouse and the parish dole. We must induce Mrs Tilby to accept another five pounds in entire settlement of her claim. That will leave a few pounds to maintain the widow and orphan, until we hear from the shipowners, or she can earn a living by her own industry. And by payment she will retain her own self-respect and self-dependence. Dr Manningham will be pleased to be released from his responsibility. The little man's fidgetiness about it of late has been quite amusing. I should think Mrs Fleming would equally rejoice

to remove her little one to a purer atmosphere."

And so well content was he with his morning's work, that neither the grumbling of his housekeeper nor the chippiness of his over-cooked dinner had disturbed his equanimity.

It was somewhat discouraging to find that the impoverished and helpless lady, on whose behalf he had taken so much trouble, did not share his satisfaction.

He found her, on his first visit in her new abode, lying on the sofa drowned in tears, bewailing her misfortunes, whilst Etta, Mrs Ashurst, and blind Will were all three endeavouring to console her, and in vain.

The poor child was sobbing because her mother cried, in sympathy for a sorrow she could not comprehend.

At the entrance of the vicar, the basket-maker and his wife retired to their own interrupted employments, the former observing, in a low tone, before he went,—

"It is a great hardship for one who has been a lady all her life to come down to

our common ways and humble rooms, sir. It has put her all out of tune, just as if I was to hang my fiddle up in the washhouse. And no wonder, sir."

This was rather discouraging to the Rev. Austin Ughtred, after he had established the poor creature so much to his own satisfaction, and not without some little sacrifice out of his narrow income. He had been moved by her tears, when she wept for her husband's loss, for her father and aunt's unkindness, for her inability to pay Mrs Tilby, for her helplessness and dependence on others, but he was scarcely so sympathetic when she began to decry the refuge he had provided for her utter destitution.

It was not in his nature to be harsh, but he felt that Mrs Fleming needed a common-sense reminder of her duty, and while he took the sobbing child on his lap, and felt in his pockets for sweets to comfort her, he asked the distressed mother quietly,—

"What is the matter, Mrs Fleming?"

"Oh dear, dear, I cannot bear it! These poor rooms, these common people. I have never been used to—oh dear! the contrast between my own home and this! What *have* I done to deserve this hard fate?"

"What has this little one done, that her mother should cause her this needless distress?"

"Needless? Oh, Mr Ughtred, you cannot understand—you—" she sobbed.

"Nay, madam, it is you who do not understand. Were you content to remain at the inn, contracting a debt you had no means to discharge?"

"Oh, sir, you know I was not, but this place—"

"Is it not clean?" he asked, interrupting her.

"Oh, dear, yes!" she assented, tearfully.

"And quiet?"

"Yes."

"Are not the people kind and attentive?"

"Oh, yes, but—"

"Do you not think the music of blind Will's violin better for this little one's ear, than the coarse songs and blasphemy of a tavern?"

There was that in his voice which seemed to hold her sobs in check. She assented faintly as one who faced a truth for the first time.

"If Mrs Tilby had wearied of you and turned you out of doors, had you anywhere a shelter for your own head or this child's?"

"God help me! No."

"Then, pray, Mrs Fleming, if you cannot yet be thankful to God for a clean, quiet home, with kind and pious people, who surrendered their own bed and sitting-room to you, a stranger, do not, *as a lady*, wound their feelings with reflections on the poverty of a home which they have regarded for years with decent pride."

She started! Had she been doing or saying anything unbecoming a lady? She began to take herself to task. She hardly heard his further remark,—

"And now let me remind you that we cannot gauge the decrees of the Almighty by our own deserts, real or imaginary, any more than we can gauge those deserts. The blind man in the other room might teach you a lesson of cheerful submission. He was blinded twenty years ago by a flash of lightning, which set fire to his farm, and burnt up the corn he had harvested. He has suffered and sorrowed, but he utters no complaint. *He* is no common man."

He left her calmer, and ashamed of her own want of *good breeding*. She had observed his courtesy towards these poor people, and henceforth felt constrained, *as a lady*, to accept their kindness and civility with like courtesy.

But she did not feel one whit more contented with her surroundings, and "only put up with them as a temporary necessity," until the receipt of Captain Fleming's salary from the shipowners should enable her to make a change.

Their first letter Mr Ughtred had

withheld until she was sufficiently composed to give it her attention. Their final one, enclosing a benefaction of thirty pounds, where she had expected a payment of about three hundred, to her mind honestly due, crushed her utterly.

She had no idea of the value of money or the expenditure of small sums. Her aunt had taken the cares of household management off her hands; on shipboard all her wants were supplied.

"Thirty pounds!" she exclaimed. "Why, that will not even purchase a pianoforte, and how can I teach music without a respectable house and an instrument? My father gave more than a hundred pounds for mine."

It needed some argument to convince her that her own plans were impracticable; that she would have to remain where she was, and be content with a cheap second-hand piano, if she would retain cash for immediate use, and that until she could obtain piano and pupils, she had better employ her fingers on the

needlework the mayoress and others had offered her.

It is needless to say that every concession to common sense cost a shower of tears.

A well-stocked work-table which had belonged to Austin Ughtred's mother, and been treasured as a sacred memorial, he offered for her use, not without some pain at its transfer; respecting the piano he enlisted the services of his friend, the organist of Canterbury Cathedral, and successfully. A square piano in a mahogany case, which had seen its best days but was not quite worn out, soon filled the wall beneath the one window, like a sideboard, and but seven of her few sovereigns had gone in the purchase.

She thanked her good friend for every kindness, in genuine, if stereotyped phrase; but she let little Etta play with the fittings of the well-kept work-table, and only withheld the piano-keys from her busy fingers, because "the very sound of the old tin-kettle was excruciating."

Fashionable masters had made of Margaret Copeland a brilliant pianist; but playing and teaching require very different qualifications, and Margaret Fleming speedily discovered that not only a poor instrument and want of practice, but a deficiency of theoretical knowledge barred her progress as a teacher of music.

Her first pupil would have been a failure, but for Will Ashurst, who, whilst voluntarily bending his long back over the piano to tune and set it in order, began to converse with her on his favourite theme, and soon discovered her ignorance of fundamental principles.

"If I were you, Mrs Fleming, I would stick to my needle until I could pick up what I had forgotten, before I began to teach. You are out of practice" (so he delicately put it). "I have never let my bow lie idle a day. If you will condescend to call me in when your memory fails, perhaps I may be some little help."

She thanked him somewhat stiffly, but

she took his advice; and the respect the Rev. Austin Ughtred paid to his choir-master somewhat softened the humiliation of learning from him what her own highly-paid masters had not sufficiently taught.

With all Mrs Ashurst's help in carrying home her work, and her practical lessons in frugality, Mrs Fleming's reserve fund slowly melted, and she soon found sewing for a living a trial alike of her strength and patience.

She had to rise with the lark as did the Ashursts, the "Morning Hymn" on Will's violin being the signal; and thus only did she gain time for the musical study now so necessary if she meant to live by it.

But she never crossed the threshold, though she soon learned the use of her crutches in the house; and, had it not been for others, Etta would have lost spirit and elasticity. Fortunately her peculiar introduction to Sandwich, and her beauty, had made "Hetty," as she was generally called, the child of many friends. They came for her, they sent for

her—not only Mrs Tilby, but Mrs Blean and the skipper—and there was always some little thing to take home with her—a Dutch doll dressed on shipboard, or a pair of warm socks knitted. Mrs Tilby's gifts mostly took the practical shape of frocks and bonnets. Even Fogge would have wonderful sea-shells, or an orange in reserve for "Hetty" when she ran to renew acquaintance. And so much had Dr Manningham been asked about her and her mother by Mrs Rye, at the Black Mill, that long before he had ceased his attendance on the broken leg, he had stopped his horse at the Ashursts' door, and carried the delighted child off in triumph before him, to be exhibited as "Euretta the Mermaiden." She came back in high glee, with hands full of cakes and posies, to talk of the wonders of the mill, the pigs and the chicks, and the lady who kissed her, and said she must come again.

The vicar, coming to and fro occasionally, and always with a preliminary knock at the door, would bring her a picture-

book, or smooth her brown hair, and talk down to her; but of all her friends and companions she had none to be compared with the blind basket-maker and musician.

Refined and soft as was the voice of her mother, there was a mournful cadence in its undertones far from inspiriting to a child; but the blind man's voice ever sang, as it were, a ringing peal of jubilant life—a swelling anthem of praise. And whether she took his hand to be led across the road through the porch to the choir of the dilapidated church, and her questionings were answered in a reverent whisper that "in a terrible storm nearly two hundred years before, the church tower was blown down on the roof, and the long rows of pillars smashed," or that he "cannot tell why they put up fresh pillars only along one aisle," or "why sham pillars of rough wood were put up instead of nice smooth ones of stone along the other aisle," it is all cheery and kind.

And whether together they wandered after service like two children along the

quay and the walls, stopping at the Barbican for a chat with Fogge by the way; or strayed away past the Black Mill, and he explained why the huge sails, then keeping Sabbath, went merrily round before the wind on other days, to grind corn into flour; or bade her listen to the melody of the skylark rising from the meadow in the bend of the river, or to the blackbird on a bramble, or to the croak of the frogs, or to the harsh cra-cra, crac-crac of a stray gannet seeking the sea; or laid a discriminating finger on the wild-flowers she gathered, and straightway gave her their names, all was fresh and charming to her whose world had been a floating barque on a restless waste of sea.

Her questions were endless, and grew with her growth; and when at home her mother had "the headache," or was "weary," or "busy," or could not "attend to her," she slipped into the next room, where the blind man was never too busy—even to explain why all the baskets he made were crooked,

though the answer touched closely upon his infirmity.

As time rolled on, through months and years, Mrs Fleming, who had begun to walk with a stick, had, thanks to the vicar, three or four music pupils to vary the monotony of stitching, and help them to live.

Unless Euretta escaped to the basket-maker and his wife, she was compelled to sit still and silent during these lessons, sometimes sewing a weary seam, until one of the girls compassionately imparted the new art of crochet, and then the busy little fingers never seemed to find the time long. What a joy it was to carry her work for inspection by Will's sensitive fingers and Mrs Ashurst's eyes! It was so much more to her than her mother's languid praise. After a time, so many customers were there for the pretty and durable trimming, that Euretta's crochet-hook was kept almost in incessant motion. But of education, as the word is understood, she was having none, unless the check her

mother kept on her manners and deportment might be counted, and the scraps of knowledge she picked up by her own inquiries and intelligence.

Not that Mrs Fleming as a mother was either unloving or inattentive; but the drudgery of life had come very hard to her, and she spent in lamenting the past, and looking forth on a dreary future, the time she had better have given to brightening the present.

Will Ashurst had made for "Hetty" an alphabet of osiers, and syllabic lore had come to her in play. He did the same with numerals, and so she learned to count and calculate small sums as a childish feat. By the same means he early familiarised her with musical notation, illustrating sounds with his beloved fiddle. But it was not until the girl's tenth birthday that the vicar—who had of late grown chary of intrusion—taking a hint from his choirmaster, remonstrated openly with Mrs Fleming on the "too much work found for Euretta's fingers, and too little for her head."

"Oh, Mr Ughtred, how can I help it? You know every shilling is of importance, and children must be kept out of mischief."

"Yes," said he, looking down on the pretty young face no longer set in a widow's cap, as he rested one hand on the square piano, and held his hat behind him with the other, "but not to the detriment of health or future welfare. You have had a liberal education yourself, and it would cost you neither time nor money to hear a few lessons every day. Suppose her grandfather were to relent, even on his death-bed, you would surely not wish to present an ignorant girl to society as your daughter.'

Her face flushed, then paled.

"Ah, sir, I have given up hope in that quarter; but I would not neglect Euretta, superficial as I know my own education has been, if I had suitable books or the means to purchase them. She will need some education even to earn her own living."

And her interlocutor saw that the widow's eyes were suffused with tears.

"Well, well, we will see what can be done about books," said he, in a different tone, as he bowed himself out, and betook himself straightway to fussy but kindly Dr Manningham's.

"Old school books! Ay, enough to stock a library. In fact, every child of mine has wanted a fresh supply, and the others have been dismissed to the nursery shelves, in all the disgrace of dogs'-ears and dilapidation. The Mermaiden is welcome to the lot."

The suggestion thrown out so adroitly by the vicar took full hold of Mrs Fleming's mind. Nevertheless Euretta's education proceeded after a somewhat desultory fashion, with now and then a music lesson thrown in, which blind Will was ready to supplement long before he obtained permission for her entrance into St Mary's choir, permission not given by the reduced gentlewoman without many a sigh. And though Austin Ughtred stepped in occa-

sionally to examine and assist the progress of his *protégée*, setting more than one heart in a flutter during his catechism, he could but shake his head when Euretta had crossed the threshold of her teens, and say she possessed but the rudiments of a good education.

For as every year had increased the cost of her attire and maintenance, so did the girl's own handiwork become of greater import; and little was the time to be spared for study or practice, whatever the vicar might say.

He, good man, grew more anxious on this account, as the winning, artless child grew into a wistful, dreamy girl, and he heard "our Hetty's beauty" praised by her first friends around the Barbican, as a something for Sandwich to be proud of, something to make the girl's own fortune; and he took her improvement on himself as a duty, giving her hints and lending her books to be read aloud either to her mother or Will Ashurst when work was slack. She was apt and diligent. In a

year or two he was ready to reverse his dictum.

It so happened that the fortunes of Euretta and her mother had occupied his mind no little of late, and at the very time Captain Ainslie suggested to Pierce Hathersage that her painted face would make the artist's fortune, the clergyman was asking himself if he might not promote the fortune of the Flemings both, by a journey to London and a personal interview with Martin Copeland either in his home or his city counting-house. He could surely inspire the rigid merchant and father with some of the pity he felt.

END OF VOL. I.

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